Lilith

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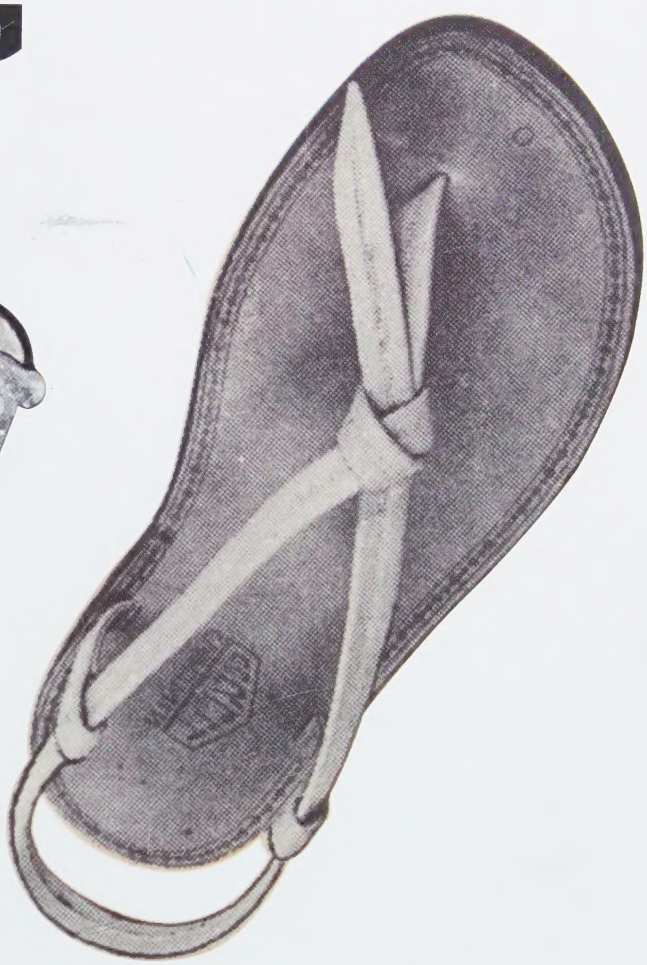

SHAMING AND THE "SLUT"— IS SHE THE JAP IN NEW CLOTHING?

5 WAYS TO WREST VICTORIOUS JEWISH MOMENTS FROM WHAT LIFE THROWS AT US

WHY PERSIAN JEWS ARE HAVING AN IDENTITY CRISIS IN L.A.

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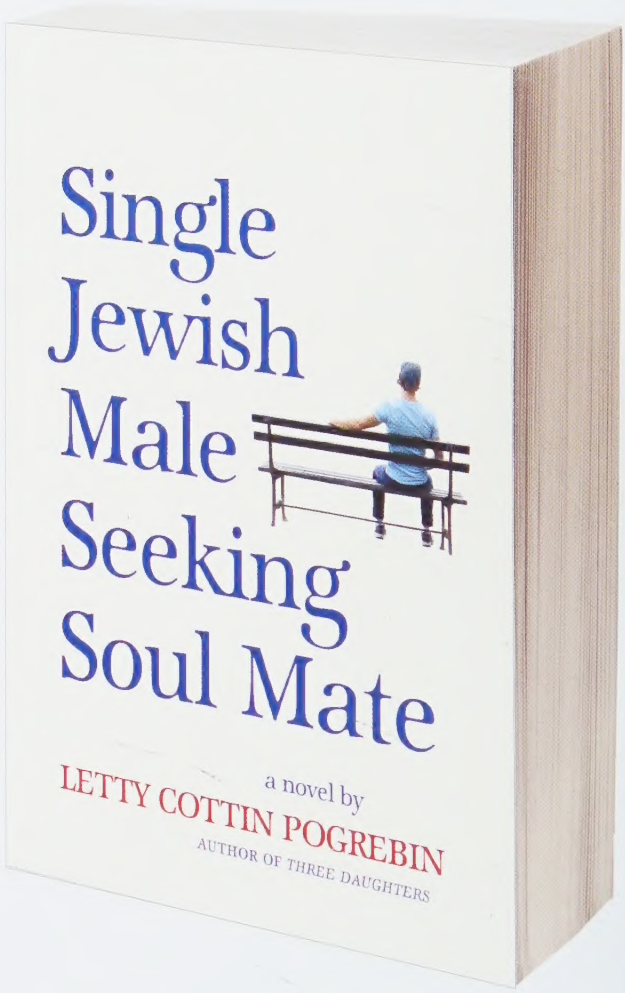
author and journalist



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"Her lovely prose gets to the very heart of what the heart wants, while also mining the legacies and commitments that define the rich history of African Americans and American Jews."

—**THANE ROSENBAUM,** author of *Second Hand Smoke* and *How Sweet It Is!*

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Lilith

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In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said, "We are equal; we come from the same earth." (Alphabet of Ben Sira, 23a-b)

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— Nessa Rapoport

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When the phone rang with a graduate student on the other end, I was surprised. Not by the call, since we get queries all the time at Lilith, but by what she wanted to know. Could she interrogate me about Lilith's reporting on food? In her research into feminist publications, Lilith had emerged as an outlier. Why was this magazine the only one with a positive view of cooking? All others viewed food as a tool for oppressing women or as a toxic substance triggering eating disorders.

I was off and running. In the hour or so we spent on the phone, I speculated on the reasons why food and "foodculture" had evolved into an obvious subject for Lilith. First, we're Jewish, and food is about transmission. Foodways provide an alluring opportunity for noticing—and sometimes even appreciating—diversity. Sephardi vs. Ashkenazi holiday morsels; conflicting expectations around women's roles; shifting intergenerational tastes; the kitchen as a place of respect or as a battleground between mothers and daughters; sibling competition for the ancestral recipe box; and more. Much more.

Jewish food-related rituals are meant to teach. Passover's injunction "Let all who are hungry come and eat" is an instruction: let hunger spur our empathy. Those raising children in circumstances of abundance can nourish their empathy by asking them to imagine "that you can't have all the food you want to eat." Families of middle schoolers might live on a SNAP (food-stamps) budget for a week. "So, no ice cream after soccer." Because eating is necessary for survival, food empathy is a powerful engine propelling us along the road to food justice.

I paused to breathe. I asked the caller to send me her final paper. I was sure, correctly, that I'd never remember all the points I was making. (Sidenote: she never did.) She wanted to know if Jews were obsessed with food. I said the obvious, that Shabbat and holidays present occasions for ritualizing a family meal. And I speculated that privation can sometimes lead to fixation. Plus, food traditions are a highly portable method of cultural maintenance, a powerful container of memories when non-consumable goods (silver candlesticks, that violin) had to be left behind.

For everyone, refugee or not, food holds nostalgia, and links us to a specific identity. For me, unique Winnipeg flavors do the trick: smoked Lake Winnipeg goldeye, the ethereal knishes of Mrs. Zaslavsky, the mocha poppyseed torte made by a woman from Vienna. Little fingers of party sandwiches with their layers of yumminess, recently extolled in the Boston Globe. My mother's komish bread, the local variant of biscotti. I mean, *come on*. I wasn't forced from my ancestral homeland, nor were any of the scores of other Winnipeggers scattered in professional precincts around the universe, but you would think, from the persistence of certain palatal sense-impressions, that we'd fled our prairie Egypt, abandoning culinary delights we'd never again savor. That's the olfactory lock of the foods we remember.

Food can cement identity; just follow Lilith's "Tasty Tuesday" posts on Facebook for examples. Eating together can bind friends, families and romantic partners, but it also has the power to cause fractures, as demonstrated by a Lilith article about a painful breakup. This five-year-old memoir, "When Food and Love Collide," has had very long legs. Readers remember its dating couple, who agree on keeping a kosher home. But he wants them to eat out only at kosher restaurants or in the homes of equally punctilious friends, and she wants to eat (though nothing non-kosher) with their less-observant buddies for the sake of keeping their social networks intact. They were in love, then doomed.

What we eat, how we prepare it, serve it, deal with the leftovers—all these are practices that evolve out of decisions we make, sometimes at every meal. Pescatarian? Vegan? Raw food? Personal food practices are a proxy for self-denial or self-indulgence, revealing an inability to share or an openness to new flavors, a way to evaluate hospitality, generosity, waste. Each choice can stake out a spiritual, ideological or political position.

Food is also about class. *Gribenes*, for example, scraps of onion and chicken skin cooked in chicken fat, a dish some of our predecessors were proud to have moved beyond, is enjoying a revival, and homemade pickles now appear in artisanal eateries. Here, too, we return to the gender question. Many of the chefs touted for reviving classic Jewish dishes are men. But home cooking, the stuff Lilith has prized as a way of recovering women's history, women's experiences and the value of women's traditional work, has until recently been considered unworthy of serious attention.

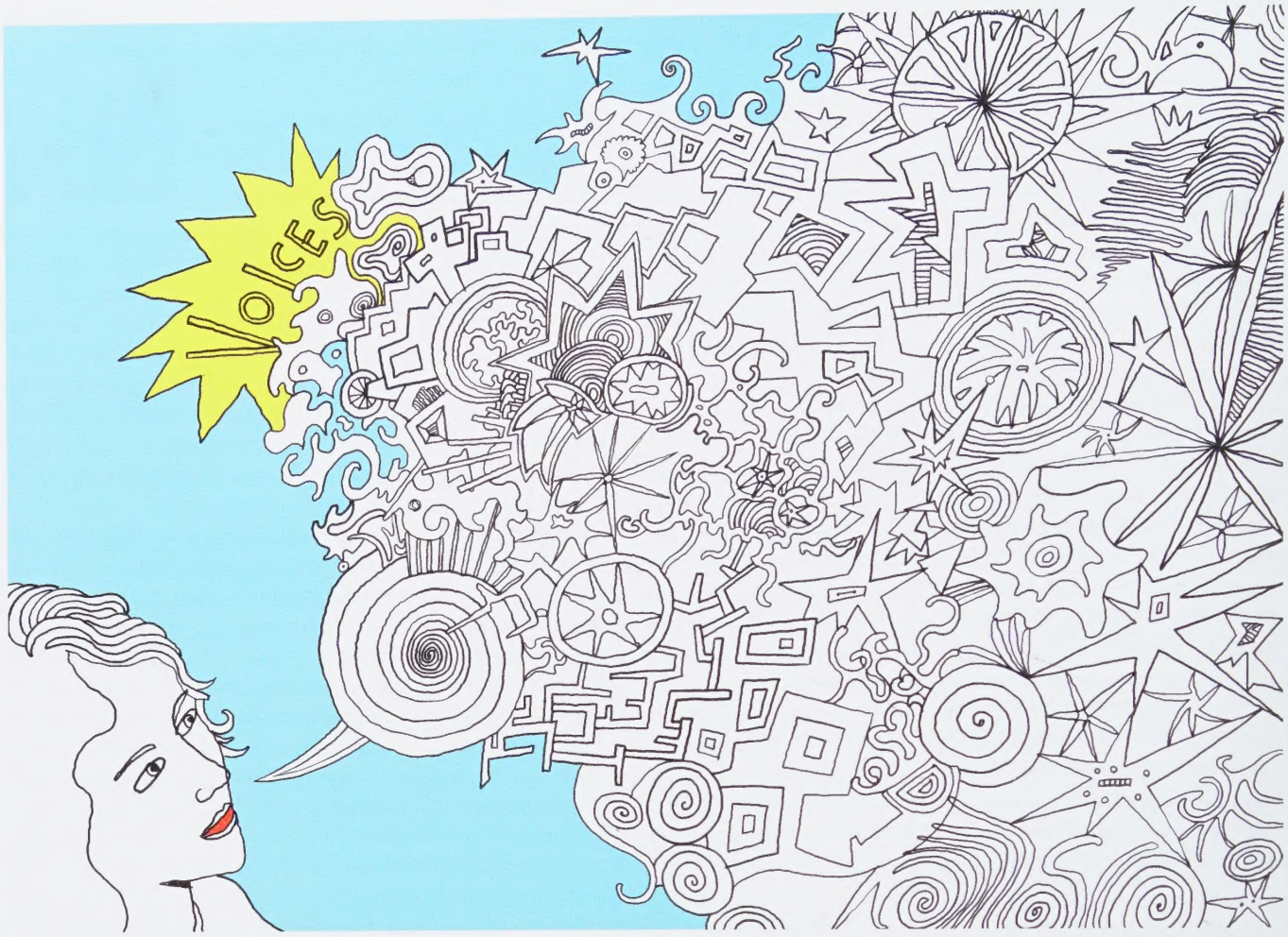
Food is about similarity and diversity, gender and power. So naturally Lilith's readers are interested.

Ruminating on the ways gender and power play out around cooking and eating, I hosted a Lilith salon conversation about food with women in their 20s and 30s at Washington's Sixth & I Historic Synagogue. A woman who's single passed judgment about restaurants and dating; what a guy ordered on a first date determined whether she'd be interested in a second. One partner in a lesbian couple bemoaned that she wasn't allowed to cook in her girlfriend's kosher kitchen. And a married, feminist mother admitted that even when injury sidelined her she resisted relinquishing the kitchen—and her power in it—to her husband.

Who owns the kitchen? Who decides on the menu, who shops, cooks, invites, serves, cleans up—all these tasks reveal power dynamics around food's pleasures and perils. So of course the discourse is fascinating. Why *wouldn't* any self-respecting feminist magazine want to take it all on?

Susan Weidman Schneider
Editor in Chief

PHOTO: DAVID GREENSPUN



THINK TANK

Matching the Chaplain to the Need

While Orthodox female chaplains are now serving hospitals on both the East and West Coasts, I've often wondered why there are so few of them—especially given that well over 50 percent of many hospitals' patients and employees are female.

Board-certified chaplains are members of interdisciplinary healthcare teams, providing spiritual care to patients, families and staff in moments of illness, loss, crisis, transition and celebration. To become a Jewish chaplain, advanced post-high school Jewish education and clinical chaplaincy training are required, but rabbinic ordination is not.

When it comes to conferring healing (or suffering) on humanity, God doesn't discriminate in relation to gender, and in the same vein, chaplains are trained to provide care that is sensitive to all people, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, race, faith, or absence of faith.

My chaplaincy training taught me to reflect on the unconscious biases that I bring to my patient encounters by virtue of being a white, Orthodox, heterosexual, Jewish male. For example, do biases influence the way I support a female patient who confides in me about an adulterous husband, or a physically abusive father? I recently offered spiritual support to a male nurse with three children going through a tortuous divorce, and I wondered how that support might have been better, or different, if the care had come from a female professional. Sometimes, when I struggle to get a patient or staff member to open up to me emotionally, I wonder if some aspect of my maleness gets in the way.

And then there are the cases where I think that an Orthodox female chaplain is specifically called for. I remember the Jewish female patient who was distressed over whether to continue a relationship with her non-Jewish partner; the 40-something woman with ovarian cancer who wondered if God was punishing her for having had an abortion decades earlier; the business professional who sought guidance over whether the time had come to freeze her eggs in the hopes that someday she'd find her *bashert* [soul mate]; the male physician who wanted to know why Jewish women were more interested in him before he became Jewish. Or that Orthodox single patient in her forties who—after years of fertility treatments that she kept secret from friends and family—was now on bed rest before celebrating the joyous birth of her child?

The field of chaplaincy is greatly enriched by women. If you or someone you know is looking to make a lasting difference by embarking on a rewarding career at the intersection of science and spirituality, body and soul, I invite you to make that happen. You will enrich our world.

RABBI DANIEL COLEMAN

VOICES ILLUSTRATION BY LIANA FINCK

SAYING "I DO!" TO INTERMARRIAGE

Rabbi Adina Lewittes has announced her decision to resign from the Conservative movement in order to marry interfaith couples. "For the first 20 years of my rabbinate I turned away interfaith couples who asked me to marry them. I believed it my professional duty to do so. But telling someone that I won't do their wedding because I disapproved of their life partner increasingly chafed against my calling to engage Jews with their heritage. Judaism isn't mine to offer or withhold at will. I don't own it. ...I could no longer judge someone for whom they love. I've been so judged. As a rabbi and as a gay woman, I could no longer defend that."

from "Intermarriage, I Do!: A Conservative Rabbi Takes the Plunge," Tablet, February 4, 2015.

GENDER TEST

Turning Girls Off—and On—to Science

"It isn't an issue of discrimination but of unconscious discouragement," according to Dr. **Edith Sand**, one of the researchers on a new study on how teacher bias in early grades skews the choices girls make later. "This discouragement, however, has implications. The track to computer science and engineering fields, which report some of the highest salaries, tapers off in elementary school." Sand is an economist at the Bank of Israel and an instructor at Tel Aviv University's Berglas School of Economics.

In a "gender test," the research demonstrated the "opting out" effects of this bias. Three groups of students in Israel from sixth grade through the end of high school were given two exams, the first graded by objective scorers who did not know their names and the second by instructors who did know them. In math, the girls outscored the boys in the test that was scored anonymously, but when graded by teachers who were familiar with their names, the boys outscored the girls. The effect was not the same for tests in non-math or science-related subjects. The researchers concluded that, in math and science, the teachers overestimated the boys' skills and underestimated the girls' abilities, and that this had long-term implications for students' attitudes toward these subjects.

"When the same students reached junior high and high school, we examined their performances in matriculation exams ('Bagrut' in Hebrew)," said Dr. Sand. "The boys who had been encouraged when they were younger performed significantly better than their female counterparts, though the latter had objectively scored higher at a younger age."

MARJORIE MORNINGSTAR (THE BOOK, THAT IS) TURNS 60

The book addresses complicated issues relating to sex and marriage, religious custom and assimilation, art and commerce, philosophizing and partying. Marjorie is a kind of Jewish-American Isabel Archer, the heroine of Henry James's 1881 novel *The Portrait of a Lady*, who also had great expectations. Interestingly, while the Partisan Review crowd adored Isabel, they scorned Marjorie. Perhaps her story was too close to their own first-generation immigrant experience.

Paula Marantz Cohen, in "Making the Case for a Neglected Novel: Marjorie Morningstar," The Wall Street Journal, February 13, 2015. For a dissenting view, see "Marjorie Morningstar Revisited" by **Elenore Lester** in Lilith's premier issue, online at Lilith.org.

NATALIE WOOD AND GENE KELLY STARRING IN THE 1958 FILM "MARJORIE MORNINGSTAR," BASED ON WOUK'S NOVEL. PHOTO: WWW.DOCTORMACRO.COM

JUSTICE-SEEKING ACTIVISTS REPAIRING THE WORLD

Beyond "Orange Is the New Black," it's time to push for enforcing the laws banning cruelties to women in prison. Tamar Kraft-Stolar, director of the Women in Prison Project at the Correctional Association of New York, highlights grimmer images than what we see on Netflix—women shackled while in labor and giving birth, despite laws forbidding this. Author of the just-released report "Reproductive Injustice: The State of Reproductive Health Care for Women in New York State Prisons," she says of its findings, "Shackling [prisoners in labor] causes physical and psychological pain. It heightens the risk of blood clots and limits the mobility that someone needs for a safe pregnancy and safe delivery. It can cause fetal death."

Kraft-Stolar told the Huffington Post that she looked at reproductive health because there "you can really see not just the dehumanization that defines life in prison in general, but the specific dehumanization that women go through."

With immigration law front-page news, work on asylum law feels urgent. Deborah Anker is a second-generation American whose Jewish grandparents crossed the Atlantic to escape the Holocaust. "I was born into a community that had just suffered so much," she told Harvard Magazine of her choice not to pursue a "happier" field.

An expert in the field of asylum law, on which she wrote the treatise that made her one of the discipline's most prominent scholars, Anker is clinical professor of law and director of the Harvard Law School Immigration and Refugee Clinical Program, which she co-founded in 1984 and which has law students representing asylum applicants. "The best doctrine is shaped by the experience of representing clients," explained Anker, who has also co-drafted groundbreaking gender asylum guidelines. She told Harvard Magazine last fall that she inherited her deep sense of social justice from her parents, both public servants with progressive values. "I have grown up with a tremendous passion about civil rights."

"Too many girls are being refused the chance to play sports and the chance to reap the positive benefits that extend beyond the playing field," says Marcia D. Greenberger, co-president of the National Women's Law Center, on widespread disparities in athletic opportunities between girls and boys. In response to a complaint filed by the N.W.L.C. in 2010, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights found that the New York City public school system—the largest educational system in the United States—has violated Title IX, the federal law that prohibits sex discrimination in education, by failing to provide high school girls with equal opportunities to play sports.

PHOTO: HARVARD CENTER FOR POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES.

TOO THIN TO CONCEIVE?

Rose E. Frisch, a scientist whose influential work showed that women without enough body fat would not only have trouble becoming pregnant, but that they also had a lower risk of breast cancer, died in January at age 96.

"Not only was it hard to be a woman in that role, but the subject matter she was talking about, sex and menarche and fertility, were things not many people discussed," said Lisa Berkman, the director of the Population Center at Harvard. "The men at the Pop Center would ask her to take notes as if she were a secretary."

Her son, Henry Frisch, said his mother had also benefited from that environment. Not expecting to receive tenure or equal treatment, she and other women were "free to follow paths that weren't conventional," he said.

Henry Frisch reported that "she was paid so little that the National Institutes of Health once called to say a grant application she had submitted should list her annual salary, not her monthly salary. 'That is my annual salary', she replied."

Pam Belluck, in "Rose E. Frisch, Scientist Who Linked Body Fat to Fertility, Dies at 96," The New York Times, February 11, 2015.

WHAT WAS SUPRISINGLY GREAT IN JOAN RIVERS RANTS

As the rare female New Comedian, Rivers's persona hit a nerve, playing as it did off a contemporary slur, the Jewish American Princess. … Rivers took that sexist bogeywoman and made it her own, raging at society from inside the stereotype: she was the Princess who did nothing but call herself ugly. She vomited that news out…. "Arf, arf," she'd bark, joking that a rapist had asked if they could just be friends. … [H]er flamboyant self-hatred made possible this generation's flamboyant self-love, set the groundwork for the crazy profusion of female comics on TV these days, on cable and network, cheerleading one another, collaborating and producing and working in teams, as if women weren't enemies at all.

Emily Nussbaum, in "Last Girl in Larchmont," a tribute to **Joan Rivers** in The New Yorker, February 23, 2015.

THE CHANGING FACE OF ISRAEL'S LEGISLATURE

"Real Zionism Is …"

Leading the charge for economic reform in Israel, wise both about community organizing and about the back-door workings of government, social-justice activist ***Stav Shaffir*** *is an Israeli woman to watch.*

Not yet 30, Israel's youngest lawmaker is already making waves.

Never in her wildest dreams did Stav Shaffir of Israel's Labor Party imagine that by this stage in her life she would have achieved something verging on political stardom.

It's not just the big messy mane of red hair that distinguishes this high-energy lawmaker from her Knesset colleagues, who often refer to her as the *gingit*, Hebrew for "redhead." At 29, Shaffir is the youngest member of the outgoing Knesset and the youngest woman ever to serve as an Israeli lawmaker.

An impassioned address Shaffir recently delivered in the Knesset is sure to go down as one of the big moments of the 2015 election campaign. Barely a handful of Knesset members were present when Shaffir took the podium, but the YouTube video of her three-minute speech—which has become popularly known as the "Who Is a Zionist" speech—became an immediate sensation on social media.

Accusing the political right of misappropriating public funds to serve its own interests, and particularly those of its settler supporters, she cried: "Don't preach to us about Zionism, because real Zionism means dividing the budget equally among all the citizens of the country. Real Zionism is taking care of the weak. Real Zionism is solidarity, not only in battle but in everyday life."

MK Stav Shaffir during a Knesset Finance Committee debate on October 28, 2014.

JUDY MALTZ, in "Not yet 30, Israel's Youngest Lawmaker is Already Making Waves," Haaretz, February 2, 2015.

PHOTO: STAV SHAFFIR BY EMIL SALMAN
PHOTO: JOAN RIVERS OPENS THE E4 UDDERBELLY SOUTHBANK FESTIVAL, MAY 27, 2009, FROM WIKIMEDIA

Her work has been described as "indelible." Israeli artist Nevet Yitzhak creates animated videos, this one based on Afghan war rugs and their extraordinary combinations of traditional, beautiful textile craft and very modern images of tanks and guns. This video piece by Yitzhak was on display recently at Art Basel Miami Beach, part of a group show aptly called "War Craft." As her website notes, "In an era when much of video art is not so different from cinema or reality shows, Nevet Yitzhak brings a new, deep and precise approach to the medium."

TEXTING SAVES LIVES

Nancy Lublin started the nonprofit Dress for Success in 1996 to give poor women the interview clothes they needed to become employed. She reinvented the teen-oriented social action nonprofit DoSomething.org in 2003. And in 2011, responding to some of the desperate text messages DoSomething was getting from teens in trouble, she started an extraordinarily useful—and brilliantly engineered—nonprofit help line, the Crisis Text Line.

"A person can contact Crisis Text Line without even looking at her phone. The number—741741—traces a simple, muscle-memory-friendly path down the left column of the keypad. ... The system, which receives an average of 15,000 texts a day, highlights messages containing words that might indicate imminent danger, such as 'suicide', 'kill', and 'hopeless'. Within five minutes, one of the counselors on duty will write back."

from **Alice Gregory**, in "R U There?" The New Yorker, February 9, 2015

EXPLICIT AND LIBERATING SEX EDUCATION

"You Should Only Be So Lucky"

Bat Sheva Marcus, a sex educator, has a new tool for enlightening not just the Orthodox or ultra-Orthodox women who are the base of her clinical practice, but the rest of the human race as well. She is the lively and genial—and often funny—co-host and resident sexuality expert for a new podcast series, "The Joy of Text," a forum for rabbinic and psychological perspectives on sexual behavior, from masturbation before (and during) marriage, to the use of sex toys, to whether fantasy can be a religiously approved aspect of sexual behavior.

"The Joy of Text" is billed as "in-depth conversations by rabbinic and medical experts about subjects that you'll almost never hear discussed anywhere else, even online." A podcast segment recorded live at LimmudNY this winter featured Marcus in conversation with **Miryam Kabakov**, author of the lesbian anthology *Keep Your Wives Away from Them: Orthodox Women, Unorthodox Desires*. In another segment, Marcus and her co-host, **Rabbi Dov Linzer**, answered a listener's question about whether it's permissible to "talk dirty." Earlier episodes discussed premarital condom use and "sneaking out to the mikveh."

Marcus, whose dissertation for her doctorate in human sexuality was on women and vibrator use, led off the LimmudNY podcast by describing how she told high school girls at a Jewish day schools that they should get a mirror and look carefully at their own bodies, and touch themselves to find out "what feels good." When one student said, incredulously, "It sounds like you're telling us to masturbate!" Marcus replied, "I am." And then, Marcus recounted, some girls said that masturbation is used as a slur, that their male peers hurl insults like "You are so hard up you masturbate." Marcus, with helpful humor, told the girls to hurl back with, "You should only be so lucky as to get to be with a girl who does masturbate."

Marcus, featured recently in the New York Times, the Jewish Week and elsewhere, is the clinical director of the Medical Center for Female Sexuality and a co-founder of JOFA, the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, which sponsors the podcasts along with the Modern Orthodox rabbinical school Yeshivat Chovevei Torah. Subscribe here: *jpmedia.co/podcasts/joy-of-text*.

SUSAN WEIDMAN SCHNEIDER

SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS

Making Art Where Religion and Rejection Intersect

Three women artists who left the religious worlds of their upbringing yet who were nonetheless able to wind back to a Judaism of comfort and inspiration spoke last winter about "Spiritual Journeys of Jewish Women Artists."

Musician **Basya Schechter**, visual artist **Helène Aylon** and writer **Susan Reimer-Torn** told their stories at Manhattan's Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, on a panel moderated by Sandee Brawarsky, culture editor of New York's Jewish Week newspaper

The three panelists' choice of headwear spoke volumes.

Schechter, musical director of the Jewish Renewal community Romemu and founder and leader of the Jewish-American world music band Pharaoh's Daughter, wore a slouchy, hippie-style hat with buttons running down its side. Aylon, a visual, conceptual, and installation artist whose art relates to Jewish biblical texts, wore a conservative black "Shabbos hat." And Reimer-Torn, writer and memoirist with (in her own words) "an anti-authoritarian streak," didn't need to accessorize at all; she was sporting a sophisticated mohawk haircut.

Clockwise from left: Basya Schecter, Helène Aylon and Susan Reimer-Torn.

Helène Aylon, 84, married an Orthodox rabbi straight out of high school, had two children, and was widowed by 30. It was after her husband's death, as an art major at Brooklyn College, that she found herself as an artist, a feminist, and a Jew. As she writes in her memoir *Whatever is Contained Must be Released: My Jewish Orthodox Girlhood, My Life as a Feminist Artist*, "My degree in art would be a degree in freedom."

Basya Schechter's break with the Orthodox world was more abrupt. As a young girl of six or seven "with an obsessive-compulsive streak," she remembers thinking that if she continued to follow *halakha*, or Jewish law, so stringently, she was "going to literally go crazy." After high school, she enrolled in a yeshiva in Israel in an attempt to "get on the right path." But she was expelled for hitchhiking, marking the real break between her old life and her new one. Her band's latest album, *Dumiyah*, beautifully reinterprets prayers and liturgical poetry.

Susan Reimer-Torn felt that as a female she couldn't "claim authority" in the Orthodox world in which she grew up. As a teenager drawn to dance, she yearned to "take possession of [her] body as a dancer." To do this, and to escape the restrictions imposed upon her by her family's brand of Judaism, she left New York for Paris, where she remained for over 20 years, living a completely secular life until her return to New York in 2001. Her memoir, *Maybe Not Such a Good Girl: Reflections on Rupture & Return*, was published in June 2014.

What emerged from these tales of repression, pain, departure, healing, self-expression, return, and (occasional) reconciliation was an exploration of the relationship between religion and art. As Sandee Brawarsky astutely pointed out, these three women artists do not take on the familiar "Asher Lev persona"—the character in the eponymous Chaim Potok novel who uses art as a means to reject religion. On the contrary, for these female artists, their Jewishness is intrinsic to their art.

Reimer-Torn talked about how the ritual, color, folklore, and transcendence involved in an Orthodox upbringing fed her creativity. Schechter described how as an Orthodox child as well as in her present-day life as a musician, she has felt that she is "channeling," or acting as a vessel for something (like God, or music), rather than creating. Aylon spoke of being inspired by the "amazing piety" of a roommate of hers who washed her hands and recited the Modeh Ani blessing upon waking up, without even leaving her bed. "When I try to explain the *Liberation of God* [to my mother]," she added, referring to one of her major works, which involved highlighting in pink the misogynistic passages of the Torah, "My mother says, 'I'm a plain person.'" Surprisingly, Aylon takes comfort in her mother's lack of interest in her feminist statement. "Do you think I wanted another answer?" Aylon asks about her mother's response. "I still need the Borough Park," she explains, referring to the ultra-Orthodox Brooklyn neighborhood. "I still need it, no matter what."

REBECCA HALFF

HELÈNE AYLON: SELF PORTRAIT 2005, FROM THE SERIES SELF PORTRAITS 2005–2007. REPRINTED COURTESY OF THE JEWISH WOMEN'S ARCHIVE
SUSAN REIMER-TORN. PHOTO: JOAN ROTH

DOCUDRAMA

"Gett"—The Film That's Shaking Up Jewish Divorce

One gripping film is accomplishing what years of quiet struggle have failed to do: create a storm of outrage over the men-only Jewish religious divorce law. A religious divorce in a rabbinical court (beit din) is the *one* divorce available to Jews in Israel, and women are powerless to sue for divorce. Civil divorce does not exist.

If a husband refuses to divorce, or if he vanishes in war or otherwise, the wife is an "agunah," a woman "chained," forever unable to remarry. (This is true for Jewish divorces outside Israel, also, but elsewhere, civil marriage and divorce are the law of the land.) Even when a husband agrees to the divorce, his agreement may be based on the extortion of concessions from his wife.

The Israeli feature film "Gett: The Trial of Viviane Amsalem" has riled up Israelis to the point of pressuring the annual conference of Israel's rabbinical judges to view the film in a private screening. (Israel's Orthodox rabbis would not typically expose themselves to movies.) No surprise, the legal advisor to the rabbinic courts, **Rabbi Shimon Yaakobi**, said the film—which follows in agonizing detail the last two years of **Viviane Amsalem**'s five-year struggle to get her husband to give her a gett—a Jewish divorce decree—in no way reflected what happens in the real-life courts. "Gett" was made by sister-brother writers-directors **Ronit** and **Shlomi Elkabetz**, and stars Ronit, one of Israel's leading actors. Israel's 2015 Oscar entry for best foreign-language film, "Gett" is being screened in the U.S. to rave reviews and horrified audiences. [See Amy Stone's post on the Lilith blog, "Get Thee to Gett."]

Pushing for change, filmmaker Shlomi Elkabetz wants DVDs of "Gett" distributed to Orthodox women, and he sees the implementation of civil divorce as the answer to Israeli women's powerless condition.

Much as we'd like to see "Gett" ignite a revolution, not so fast. In the words of **Ruth Halperin-Kaddari**, professor of law at Bar-Ilan University and director of the university's Rackman Center for the Advancement of the Status of Women, "Israeli religion and state politics are a lot stronger than one movie." She calls the Israeli population's denial of women's inferior status "the 'no-problem' problem." This national mentality, embedded in marriage and divorce law, makes it possible to set women's rights aside as less important than issues of national security.

Ronit Elkabetz plays her mother, Viviane Amsalem, in "Gett."

With no civil or interfaith marriage or civil divorce, Israel's score of zero puts it in the company of Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Congo-Kinshasa, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Sudan on the "Freedom of Marriage World Map" published by the Israeli nonprofit Hiddush.

In fact, Israel is the only Western country receiving a grade of zero on the "Freedom of Marriage World Map" published by the Israeli nonprofit Hiddush. With no civil or interfaith marriage or civil divorce, Israel's score of zero puts it in the company of Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Congo-Kinshasa, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Sudan.

So where will change come from?

The Center for Women's Justice, located in Jerusalem, is using Israel's civil court system to achieve justice for agunot. It was started by **Susan Weiss**, an American-born Israeli lawyer. Weiss is making legal inroads by suing recalcitrant husbands for human rights violations under tort law. She's been successful in winning divorces and/or large awards for emotional damage for otherwise powerless women.

But male privilege as exemplified by the rabbinical court is not about to fade away. In the U.S., rabbinical organizations have established escape clauses in the ketubah, the Jewish wedding contract. But few Orthodox Jews avail themselves of these halachically driven attempts at equal rights should a woman want to divorce.

Orthodox Jewish feminists who have spent decades devoted to the cause of freeing agunot see halachic change as the solution. As **Blu Greenberg**, founding president of JOFA, the

Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, wrote in Lilith some years ago, "Where there's a rabbinic will, there's a halachic solution." She's certainly been proven right applying that same patient reasoning in another respect—the opening of the gates for women to serve as Orthodox rabbis in almost all but name, although these pioneers are still controversial.

The institution holding out fresh hope is the International Beit Din (IBD), headed by highly respected Orthodox rabbi **Simcha Krauss** in the Riverdale section of the Bronx, New York City. The independent IBD, which heard its first case in August 2014, is dedicated to finding halachically acceptable ways to free these chained women. A trio of rabbis—Krauss, **A. Yehuda (Ronnie) Warburg** and **Yosef Blau**—are delicately treading a path rife with pitfalls. In the past, highly regarded Orthodox rabbis determined to free agunot have failed to get other rabbis to accept their rulings.

In a breakthrough in transparency, the IBD promises to post its decisions online, in English, giving the halachic reasoning behind each judgment without revealing couples' names. In another IBD innovation, female psychologists and social workers will be supporting the agunah throughout the proceedings.

While the IBD has already met with criticism from some Orthodox rabbis in the U.S. and Israel, those close to the issue are hopeful. Halperin-Kaddari says, "We'll see if other courageous men will support the IBD and not be intimidated." Although it's still small, the IBD, Halperin-Kaddari says, "could create some competition. Rabbinical courts would find themselves much more accountable than they are now, and that would make a difference."

AMY STONE

WOMEN AND MEN AS PHILANTHROPISTS:

Women are more likely than men to give to good causes.

"There are a variety of ways to explain the difference.... For instance, women might feel that people are poor because of their bad luck or due to societal failures. Men may be more inclined to blame a lack of skills or the will to succeed. But the main reason women are more likely to help the needy, the authors of [a recent] study say, is that women tend to be more empathetic and compassionate."

In a controlled experiment, the only kind of charity appeal that "raised men's willingness to give money or volunteer at a rate comparable to that of women" was this one: "Poverty weighs down our interconnected economy, exacerbating many social problems like crime" because it generated feelings of self-interest.

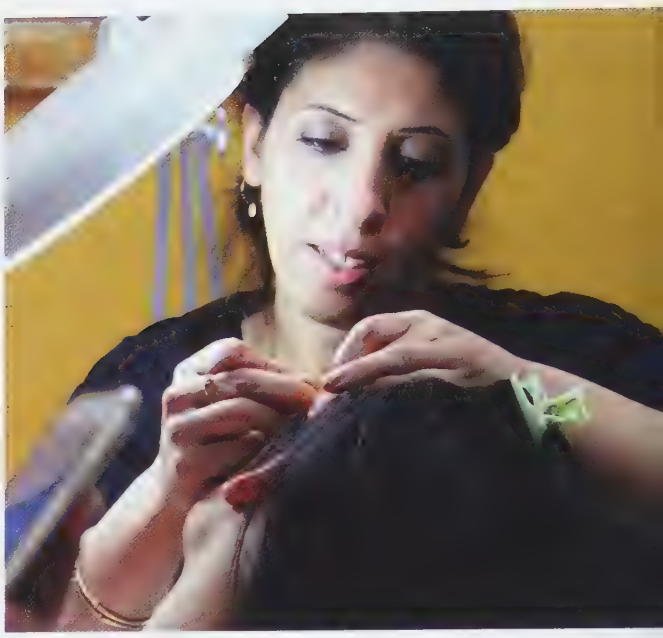
from a report on gender differences in charitable giving by **Alex Daniels** in The Chronicle of Philanthropy, February 13, 2015.

MILESTONE

This season marks the 25th anniversary of the publication of the landmark book *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* by theologian **Judith Plaskow**. These lines from her first chapter resonate still:

"The need for a feminist Judaism begins with hearing silence. It begins with noting the absence of women's history and experiences as shaping forces in the Jewish tradition."

Letting Our Hair Down



by MIRYAM SIVAN

Nadia's hair salon is on the ground floor of her house, a five-minute drive from my house in the Jewish town of Kiryat Tivon. Nadia Zubidat, 38 years old, lives in the Bedouin village of Zubidat, 15 kilometers southeast of Haifa, in Israel's Galilee. We have known each other for 10 years, and in that time have seen our daughters grow up, her two sons born, and our personal and political perspectives widened significantly by wars and life experience. Nadia and I meet as regularly as the white roots that appear on my head—about every three weeks.

There are always women of all ages at Nadia's. They're getting their hair cut, colored, highlighted, styled. Eyebrows shaped. Faces waxed. Nadia's clients, Muslim and Jewish women from the surrounding area, come to her faithfully because she's so good at what she does, and because she is a powerhouse of a positive woman with exceptional professional and domestic skills. A serious *balebusta*, as we say. Dozens of clients—and she files each one's hair-color formula in her head. Same with culinary recipes.

Though I always bring a book with me, it usually remains closed. The goings-on in the salon are too interesting to miss.

"I need to know. How did you get them so light?" Nadia asks Ruti, a Jewish woman having her hair cut, about the homemade Alfajores cookies she brought with her.

"I'll tell you later."

"No, tell me now. I know you." Nadia teases Ruti and hands the box around for all of us to sample. "We'll get busy talking about other things, then you'll run out, and I won't get the recipe."

"I promise I'll give it to you. And if we forget, I'll send it to you when I get home. Stop worrying."

"You better. I need to make them," Nadia says, and we all laugh.

The traditional South American Alfajores cookie—a delicate crumbly sandwich filled with *dulce de leche* and rolled in shredded coconut—is serious business in both Arab and Jewish communities in Israel. Nadia, a prolific cook and baker, is determined to try Ruti's outrageously good recipe. Usually the recipes fly the other way around, with clients asking Nadia how she makes her fish, her zucchini, her many eggplant salads.

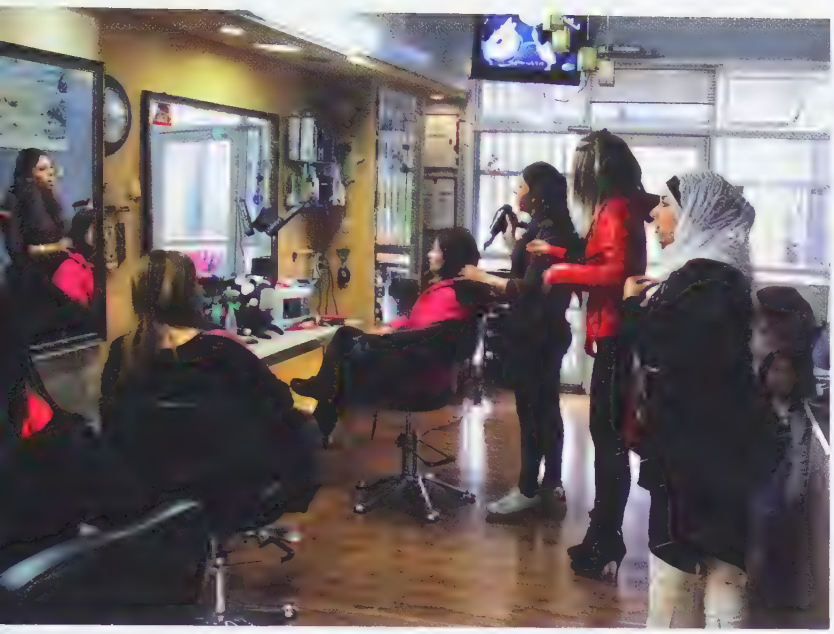
Ruti leaves without giving Nadia the recipe. Could be she's not eager to share it. Nadia is undeterred. Before she begins to apply color to my hair roots, she calls Ruti.

"I told you we'd forget," she mock-scolds. "Okay. Send it. I'm waiting." She turns to the women in the shop. "She's going to take a photograph of the recipe and send it on What's App."

Sure enough, moments later Nadia's phone has an incoming ding. The recipe has landed.

Where Jews shop in Israel is an openly political act. During times of aggression between Israeli and Palestinian forces, both inside the State and outside, in Gaza or the West Bank, there are those who say the Jewish public should punish Israel's Arab citizens via an economic boycott—to isolate them, to have their billfolds remind them of the power of the Jewish majority. During the Gaza War this past summer, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman called for a boycott of Arab businesses that expressed sympathy for the people of Gaza. Jews were not immune. Those who spoke out against the loss of children's lives south of the border—like actress

PHOTOS BY MIRYAM SIVAN



Orna Banai, filmmaker Shira Geffen, and musician Achinoam Nini—were labelled traitors and ostracized in social and print media. (The first Jewish voices emphasizing humanitarian concern were women, and they were the first ones publicly vilified as well.) But for these artists, and for thousands of others living here, it is possible to be both concerned for Israel's soldiers and civilians and also to oppose government decisions.

During this last war, and the one before that in 2012, and the one before that in 2008, and the one before that in 2006, and during the Second Intifada that began in 2000, there were those like me who didn't heed the call to boycott Arab businesses. I never stopped patronizing Nadia's, or the supermarket, greengrocer, tire shop, car wash, bakery, nuts shop, housewares shop, building supply place, plant nursery, electronic store in the two villages closest to me, Basmat Tivon and Zubidat. And the Bedouins who live there have continued to shop and patronize the stores and cafes in my town of Kiryat Tivon. Without too much fuss, most of us around here reaffirm social ties developed over decades. We don't only live side by side. Our lives are bound up with one another.

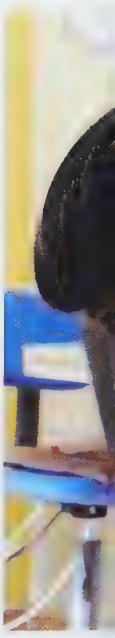
And yet, even in progressive Jewish Tivon, during this last war there were those who decided not to go into the Bedouin shops until the fighting stopped. "The Situation" (*ha-matzav* in Hebrew… euphemism for the violence, like "The Troubles" in Ireland) made them uncomfortable. Or they were afraid. Some said they wanted to buy only "blue and white." But aren't the Bedouins blue and white, I asked? Aren't they citizens whose businesses are part of Israel's economy, whose sons are fighting at this very moment in Gaza?

I first met Nadia in 2004 when I went to Hanna's in Kiryat Tivon's town center. Nadia was Hanna's assistant, and the shop was almost entirely patronized by Jewish women. In 2008, Hanna retired and Nadia, pregnant with her first son, decided to take time off. Then, three years ago, I ran into Nadia at the local supermarket in Zubidat. She told me she had opened her own hair salon in the ground floor of her house. Happy, I typed her number into my phone, and the following week came to take care of my rogue white hair roots. I didn't go to Nadia's because she's Bedouin and I wanted to empower her. I went because my hair was a big mess after I'd been dying it on my own for over a year and was desperate for bona fide professional attention. An added bonus, then and now, is that she is Bedouin and I am happy to spend my shekels there and to send friends to her. Another bonus is the opportunity to be close to her and to her community of women every three weeks.

The women who come to Nadia's usually don't bring their children, though most have them. Time at Nadia's is time for themselves, time to be pampered, time to talk to other women, to trade recipes, to gossip. If I knew Arabic I could follow the conversations. As it is, I only understand a word here, a phrase there. When there is a lot of laughter I know I am missing out on some juicy item. Sometime Nadia translates for me, sensing my eagerness to be in on the loop. At these times I feel so helpless that I don't know Arabic. This is not just a personal matter, it's a countrywide, contrived imbalance: all Arabs, Bedouins, Circassians and Druze learn Arabic, Hebrew, and English in school; Jews learn only Hebrew and English. There was a time when Arabic was compulsory in Jewish schools. But with the increasingly right-wing government, not only was that amended, but this past August a Knesset bill was proposed to make Hebrew the only official language in the country. Luckily it did not pass.

When the talk switches into Hebrew, which happens frequently and easily, especially if there are a number of Jewish clients in the shop, I can fully participate, usually about food, children, fashion. Yet over the years, I have begun to detect a

Now there's more talk about women's lives, the yearning for more options. I'm delighted. For years I've wanted to ask pointed questions....



shift in topics. Traces of politics now appear. When we spoke about the war this past summer, first we expressed concern for the soldiers. The Jewish and Bedouin women sitting there all had family members "in"—as in "in Gaza."

But then there was talk about governments and the men who make war and the families who suffer. Tentatively, I spoke about what I saw as the cynical exploitation on both sides of the border and was surprised when other women voiced similar opinions. Then we talked about the pain of seeing the dead children in Gaza, the families made homeless. Feeling sadness for the civilians in Gaza in no way diminishes the pain we feel for those on the Israeli side of the border for whom rockets have become an intolerable part of their lives. Up in our neck of the woods we have also suffered rocket attacks... in fact the fears and losses of the Israeli residents near the Gaza border are very real to me, to us, too.

In Nadia's shop we let our hair down. Some of us literally. A few months ago I watched a woman's long silky hair being blown dry. In this country of Semites, much time is spent straightening natural curls. Same goes for creating pencil-thin eyebrows.

"She's been here half the day," Yasmin, Nadia's assistant, told me. "Came in the morning for a cut and then decided to stay for a new color, then decided on blond highlights." The woman's little boy rolled on the couch. His patience had come to an end, though he entertained himself and waited some more.

Finally the coiffure was done. The woman got up from the chair and everyone told her how beautiful she looked. And she did. The real added value to coming to Nadia's is that everyone leaves more beautiful. This woman smiled delightedly, then took a large dark brown scarf from her bag. Practiced, she pressed it down flat on her forehead and wound it tightly around her head. She left, and I asked Nadia: "So much work now under wraps?"

"When she gets home she takes off the scarf," Nadia said. "She's religious, so only at home."

"That's a lot of work for only at home," I said, thinking too of religious Jewish women who uncover their hair only at home.

Nadia shrugged. "She wants to feel good when she's home. Why not?"

And indeed, why not? Lately, there's been more talk at Nadia's about women's lives, their discontent with the status quo, wanting change, yearning for more options and opportunities. I'm delighted. For years I've been dying to ask pointed questions, to do my feminist probing. Some women describe the hardships, the imbalances and injustices they experience, both in the street and at home.

Husbands who expect them to shoulder 100% of the household work, cooking, shopping, cleaning, children; the demand to take care of in-laws; increasing pressure to do all that plus work outside the home and bring in an extra income, like Nadia; the demand to do all that and also look good. One woman says her husband sits in his chair while she stands before him and turns around slowly. She's a beautiful mother of four, with a head full of yellow curls that Nadia cares for regularly, wearing tight jeans and a flattering tee-shirt, and this scrutiny is no modesty-police tactic. It's a more routine kind of sexist patrolling. Her husband wants to check out how she's dressed, how her face and hair are done up.

"As if he cares about me." We sit together on the couch and wait. Me for my hair to be shampooed, she to pick up her little ones from school. "He just wants to make sure I look good so he won't be embarrassed in front of the other men."

Other women chime in. They know that script all too well. Vashti, I think to myself. Called to appear before the King to show off his prized possession to the assembly of men: a woman of beauty. And like Vashti, these women know, as I do too, the price paid for disobeying male authority. Few have the economic and social support to divorce. Many suffer silently. In Nadia's

world, unlike in my Jewish one, only a few dare to protest. But Nadia does.

"I saw your Facebook post," I tell Nadia, impressed with her bold public listing of women's labors. She'd written a long and proper *J'Accuse* that reminds dear husbands to see and appreciate the endless household work women do, the physical pain of childbirth, the not-simple matter of losing a family name compounded by leaving a family and moving in with a new strange one, and the unsung efforts women put into providing men with a relaxed and healthy home life that fosters well-being.

"Oh, you saw it!" Nadia laughs. "My husband asked me if I posted it for him. And I said, yes, I post on Facebook *just for you*." She laughs harder and I laugh along with her.

Sometimes I interject that sexism is rampant in Jewish society as well. And the response is consistently: "not like in ours." And I don't contest this, because they're right, and we know it. We live too close together for the disparities in our lives as women not to be totally obvious. Israel's secular Jewish society is exasperatingly sexist, with, for example, a persistent 25% average wage gap between men and women. And we can find ourselves at the mercy of the utterly patriarchal rabbinate, whose far reach controls our marriages and our divorces and sometimes even our children. Still, Jewish women have far greater mobility to go places physically, intellectually, and emotionally without male permission and supervision. We have more life options.

Last year Nadia told me that if it were acceptable in her village, and if she had the energy, she would run for the head of the local council. Clean things up, set them right. I encouraged her to do it. She would be amazing in politics. She laughed and said they'd never give her the chance. Maybe her daughter's generation. She decided to have another baby instead. "That's good too," I smiled, and we stared at my shaped hair in the mirror, admiring her skillful handiwork.

Now, with her baby boy sleeping in a stroller next to her, Nadia tells me she wants her eldest daughter to attend a summer camp for Palestinian and Jewish teenage girls in the United States.

"It's only for girls, so my husband agreed," she says. "I really want her to go. It's for peace. To teach them to talk, and to listen. To learn about each other." Nadia is ambitious for her children.

My good friend's daughter participated in that program a few years ago, I tell her. It was intense, not always easy, but overall a wonderful experience. And I make the connection. My friend and her daughter drive five minutes from our town to Nadia's house. Over tea, the mothers and daughters talk. Questions are answered, phone numbers exchanged. Afterwards, Nadia tells me, her daughter feels more confident about her upcoming interview, an important part of the application process.

Girls learning to listen to one another. Girls learning to speak about their lives. Girls becoming part of a peace process that recognizes that the partner on the other side is as human as she is. Exactly what we do at Nadia's. Jews, Muslims, Americans, Bedouins—Israelis all of us, involved in the hard work of taking care of ourselves and those we love. In the safe female corner of the hair salon we open our pocketbooks, our skill sets, our hands and our hearts to one another. We have learned over the years to trust one another enough to share some of what we enjoy in life, what we find not comfortable, and what is confusing. We talk, we listen, we relax into the stories of each other's lives across a divide we accept but are not eager to fortify. ■

Miryam Sivan, a former New Yorker, now lives in the Galilee and teaches literature and writing at the University of Haifa. SNAFU and Other Stories, *her collection of short fiction, was recently published by Cuidono Press in NY.*

FIVE EASY PIECES

finding the golden (Jewish) thread.

"I have always been pleased by my good fortune in being a Jew," wrote Philip Roth almost 50 years ago. "It's a complicated, interesting, morally demanding, and very singular experience, and I like that. I find myself in the historic predicament of being Jewish, with all its implications. Who could ask for more?"

With this in mind, Lilith unwraps, in the following pages, five narratives that exemplify how singularly each one of us conjures that mystical, idiosyncratic, completely individual spark that binds each of our separate souls to its tiny, specific Jewish essence [in Yiddish, *dos pinteleh yid*].

That essence may reside in the memory of resisting a substitute Hebrew school teacher's terrible lesson plan [P. 17]. Or maybe it presents as a lifelong centripetal pull to give back to our community [P. 18]. Is it the Jewish pledge we made, in our Christian childhood, that burrowed underground for years before we made good on it [P. 20]?

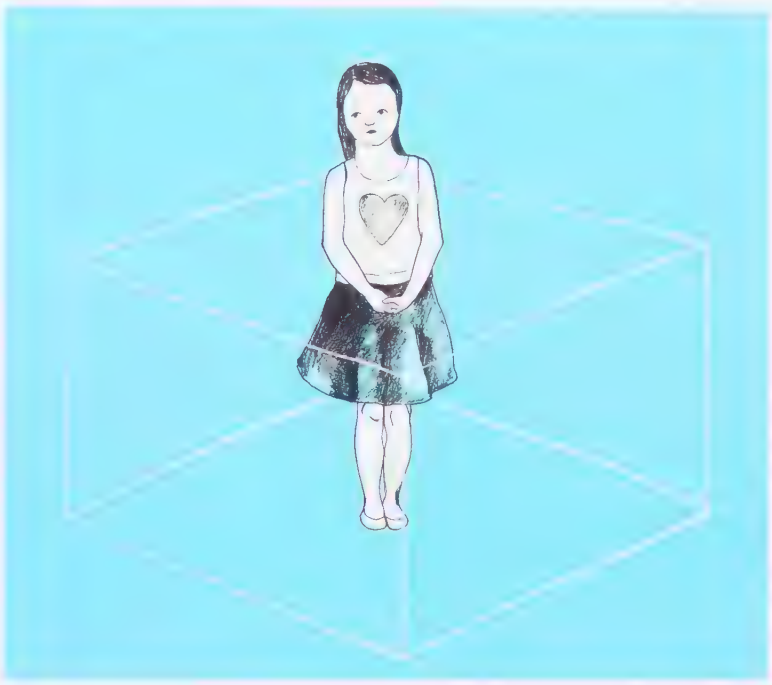
The essence might be the company of two biblical characters, Hannah and Eli, who periodically pop up in unsuspecting lives [P. 22]. Or, finally, it can surface in our grocery store's produce section where a Holocaust survivor's fleeting presence erases years of acrimonious Passover seders [P. 25].

Each of us surely has our own golden Jewish thread that runs through everything. What's the good fortune of yours?

—*Susan Schnur*

in a corner of the Hebrew school classroom.

by SARI M. BOREN



"PICK A CORNER," the substitute said.

Not a single student moved.

"Which label best describes you?" The pitch of her voice and the hem of her dress were considerably higher than those of our regular Hebrew school teacher.

The substitute had hung a hand-lettered sign in each corner of this rarely used classroom, where the small desks and chairs had been pushed out of the way. My classmates, 10-year-old boys and girls, looked at one another, at the signs, and at the substitute teacher commanding the center of the room, pointing to each corner in turn. This was not like regular Hebrew school.

We typically gathered at the synagogue on Monday and Wednesday afternoons to learn to read Hebrew words right to left, dipping down to catch the vowel markings under the consonants. We studied conversational phrases of modern Hebrew: *The dog is in the house. The man on the kibbutz plants trees.* Under the tutelage of our regular teacher, Mrs. Cantor, we practiced singing the lilting, mournful tunes of the Shabbat prayers, sitting or standing as required by the holiness of the words, and on Yom Kippur confessing our unknown failings against God. Mrs. Cantor kept time, slapping her palm against her massive wooden desk.

I repeated the tunes and words of the prayers by rote until they merged into familiar ritual chants. I learned their places in the sequence of the service and the briefest explanation of their purpose.

This prayer exalts the holiness of the Lord.

This prayer expresses thankfulness for His gifts.

This prayer declares that You are the Lord, our God.

And let us say, Amen.

We didn't discuss the translations, printed in English on the facing pages. No thoughts of why we were dust and God was everything. No wondering what we needed God for, other than to listen to prayers we didn't understand. He gave us life and he gave us Torah—His words and rules to live by—and that was plenty.

TODAY'S ACTIVITY HAD started out as an exciting reprieve.

"Pick a corner." The substitute acted like it was a game, but it felt like a test.

Each corner had a different sign: *Human Being*; *Boy or Girl*; *American*; and *Jew*.

"It's OK to think about it," the substitute said, since none of us had moved.

We weren't stupid; we knew what we were being asked to do. Most of us shuffled off to the *Jew* corner; a few of the more rebellious boys went over to the *American* corner, and then there was me, hanging back, probably chewing the end of my one long braid.

Why *Human Being*? I thought. We're all human beings. It's not like the class was half kids and half dogs.

The *Boy or Girl* sign was just embarrassing. I wasn't going to stand under a sign to say, "Look at me. I'm a GIRL."

That left *Jew* or *American*.

The teacher asked me again, now alone by the door, to pick a corner.

I wouldn't reject my Jewishness any more than I would reject my name or my face, but I couldn't disown my American identity either. My Americanness is what protected me.

I shook my head. *No.*

A FEW MONTHS EARLIER, for show-and-tell, I'd brought in a photo album I'd made from stapled green con-

ILLUSTRATIONS BY HILA PELEG

struction paper, the photos taped to the rough pages. The original prints of a Polish concentration camp came from undeveloped film my dad had taken off a Nazi soldier after he—my father—had been liberated. I turned the pages to share the black-and-white images: an emaciated man standing beside the impenetrably dark hole of an oven; mounds of bodies like scrawny felled trees stacked for burning.

Here we were, the Jews.

I wish I could reconstruct the state of mind that led me to drag the piano bench over to the guest room closet, climb up and pull down the small, scuffed leather valise from its place on the high shelf next to our vacation slide carousels, and sort through the pictures and documents, picking out the photos and arranging them in a sequence that made sense to me.

After taping down the white-bordered photos, I made a book and packed it up to bring to Hebrew school. I doubt my mother knew about this project. She wouldn't have let me risk damaging these evidentiary photos. And she would have had the sense to keep them from being shown to a class of 10-year-olds, mediated only by another 10-year-old: *Here we all are in Hebrew school, the Jews; and here we are on these pages, the Jews.*

I knew from conversations among adults at dinner that there were no "us Jews" and "those Jews." There were just, always together, Jews.

I don't remember what I said, or if my classmates raised their hands to ask questions, or if Mrs. Cantor intervened or let me finish "showing" the photos and "telling" God-knows-what.

But I do remember the afternoon the substitute teacher led us out of our regular class to the room where someone had moved the furniture. What kind of a teacher asks a group of Jewish kids to intuit the desire of an authority figure to obediently line up in a corner under a sign that says *Jew*? Had we learned nothing?

LIKE MOST KIDS, my favorite Jewish holidays were the ones that were most action-packed. They happened to feature people trying to kill us, even if they didn't finish the job. Story after story of not-completely-successful attempts to kill us off.

We seemed so *unlikable*.

We weren't supposed to care about that. We were supposed to care only that God continued to swoop down and save us.

But the reason we were hated was that we believed in a different God, so God made picking the *Jew* label problematic.

But I couldn't pick the *American* corner. I was a Jew. Not just because I was taught that the Nazis didn't care what kind or what fraction of Jew you were. I liked being Jewish. I liked figuring out the code of our backwards alphabet. I liked raising my voice in prayer in concert with my classmates. It filled me with the power and comfort of belonging.

But I wouldn't be bullied into the *Jew* corner any more than I could be forced to believe in the miracles from our holiday stories. What kind of loving God would go out of his way to keep a light burning for eight days, just to reward faith? A *light* is just a symbol, not a necessary thing in itself. Like a mother. Or a village. Was a *light* worth more than the lives of my grandparents and aunts and uncles? More than the lives of my cousins? Worth more than the lives of the people in the photos, the ones who didn't look like people anymore?

Even at 10, I could see it was way past time for the substitute teacher to congratulate herself for leading us privileged, suburban kids through an identity-raising

in a congregation's response to attempted murder.

by MONIQUE FAISON ROSS

MORE THAN A DECADE AGO, I was harassed and stalked for three months by my estranged husband. We had been in and out of court, with the judge issuing injunctions for protection. During those months—as if by some divine miracle—my eldest daughter celebrated her bat mitzvah.

Shortly after the *simcha*, my husband (and the father of my three children) turned violent. Armed with a gun, he forced me into my car and drove me to a secluded area. There he violently beat me, struck my head multiple times with a shovel, and left me for dead.

After being in the ICU for several days, I was discharged to home. Suddenly there I was: not only needing to recover physically, but without a job and with no means to support or feed myself and my children. During the stalking, my employer had laid me off, fearing workplace violence. My husband, wounded by police gunfire, was medically stabilized and then sent to prison.

exercise. We were running late to translate *Jerusalem cats chase dogs under the date trees.*

I shuffled over to a spot halfway between the *Jew* and the *American* signs, and there I stood.

I COULDN'T ARTICULATE this when I was 10, but in the post-war branding of the Holocaust—the cry of *Never Again*—God's protection was never invoked. We instead rallied to self-determination and alliances. I knew my Americanness protected me. I don't mean just physical protection, the conviction that we were safe on the Jersey Shore from the contemporary version of marauding Cossacks. I mean, my Americanness protected me from having to identify as helpless, unlikable, and friendless in the world. It protected me from the literalness of prayer. It protected me from a God who cared about his image more than about our lives. ■

The photos came from film my dad had taken off a Nazi soldier after he'd been liberated.

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I HAD ALWAYS VALUED being an active member of my community. I was a good neighbor, I pitched in unfailingly as a parent at my kids' school and after-school activities, and I involved myself in civic events. Wherever we lived, though—including in a small prefecture in Japan—my biggest involvement was with the Jewish community. It was a priority for me, when we moved somewhere new, to make sure we found a warm and welcoming Jewish community of which to be a part.

Prior to this traumatic period in my family's life, we'd experienced five years living and participating in the Jewish community at the Jacksonville Jewish Center in Florida. My children were students at the Solomon Schechter Day School that was attached to the Center's building, and we were regular attendees at services. We knew many of the members at our congregation, and they knew us.

WHEN I REGAINED consciousness in the ICU, I opened my eyes to a huddle of warm and familiar faces. A small team of attorney friends from the Center were talking with my attorney (also from the Center), trying to figure out how they could be of assistance. They stayed involved for the six months it took to settle my divorce and have the state of Florida prosecute my ex-husband for criminal acts. (He was sentenced to prison for 26 plea-bargained years.) I never received a single legal bill. Others from the Center fed us—for three solid months—bringing hot meals and groceries to our door every day. I am sure there were many, many acts of kindness on our behalf that I am still not aware of.

The *mitzvot* did not stop. When Hanukkah arrived, my kids each received perfect, customized gifts. I particularly remember my four-year-old son opening a large Buzz Lightyear talking action-figure which became indispensable to him for years. I was in no position as a mother to afford anything for my children, and I wept tears of gratitude when others stepped in to keep me from feelings of maternal failure.

The biggest gift was that all of this happened without my having to ask for help. We'd had months of tragedy, but it was offset by the profound experience of having been stupendously cared for.

THESE SELFLESS ACTS became formative memories for my children, each of them having experienced the power of having a community surrounding and supporting you when you desperately need help. I find myself telling my kids, though they already know this, that no matter where they live, it is critical

to become participating members of their Jewish community. I emphasize how crucial a role each person can and must play, and how important it is that each of them ensure that his or her community thrives.

We choose our friends; we also choose our communities. We shared a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and it changed us.

Since our ordeal, my children and I have volunteered even more in our communities, donating gifts to families in need at Christmas and Thanksgiving, giving to any and all community toy drives, and always participating with the spirit of good citizenship and of caring about our fellow human beings.

We don't choose our family, but we choose our friends; we also choose our communities. I have remained comforted that, throughout the years, my family has chosen its Jewish communities wisely, each and every time. My children had early examples of selflessness—both of giving and of having to take—and I trust that as they go out into the world they will actively participate in their own chosen Jewish communities.

We shared a once-in-a-lifetime experience and it changed us, making us feel grounded, surrounded, and forever grateful. We will always give back. ■

Monique Faison Ross now lives in West Hartford, Connecticut, with her wife of two years. Their wedding was the first same-sex marriage in her Conservative synagogue's 95-year history. Her four children now range in age from 12 to 30.

down the crooked path to a daughter's bat mitzvah.

by MARTY ROSS-DOLEN

MY DAUGHTER'S BODY is enveloped by the *tallis*—woven silk threads of pale pink and white and green that we had commissioned for her to wear on this day. Underneath, she wears a cropped cardigan over a wisp of a dress—peach-dotted fabric that drops to her knees over a crinoline skirt.

"It's perfect, Mom!" she said days earlier as she spun around in the store's dressing room, just enough air caught underneath to lift the crinoline in a billow—this being at least the hundredth dress she had tried.

Her straight brown hair frames her face, capped by a handmade white *kippah* macraméd with lace and sequins. A miniature Elsa Peretti Star of David—which I gave her the day before—hangs from a thin chain and sits in the hollow of her throat.

I am seated in the front row, facing the *bimah*, which is infused by warm hues from the sanctuary's stained glass. My father, who gave me Judaism, sits to my right. I watch as my daughter reads the hand-inked Hebrew words from the Torah, her pitch rising and falling as dictated by ancient trope, her pronunciation deliberate. She is a master at this. As the silver-pointed finger of the *yad* glides over the parchment, she becomes a full-fledged member of those who can read. She is one of them.

MY PARENTS MARRIED as teenagers; my father from a non-practicing Jewish family on Long Island, my mother from a Protestant family in Texas. They found each other in college and decided to raise their children Jewish; my father's wish and my mother's choice. I was named Mary for my mother's deceased mother but have always been called Marty at my father's insistence, lest there be confusion about my faith.

I started my Jewish education as a kindergartener in a suburb of Boston, and my parents created a Jewish home for my two younger brothers and me. We lit menorah candles and never decorated a Christmas tree. We searched under sofa cushions for the *afikomen* and never hunted for Easter eggs or were given baskets filled with plastic grass and chocolate bunnies.

Just before I turned eight, my family moved to Columbia, South Carolina, where my father served as an Army physician. The Jewish community was much smaller there, and school children were eager to point out differences. When assigned to make Easter baskets from Popsicle sticks, I instead glued together a "Passover basket" topped with a Star of David.

"P.U.! A Jew!" one boy said, holding his nose and pointing.

When my father returned home from work that evening, I shared with him what had happened as he changed his clothes from a long day.

"That's right—I'm a Jew! And I'm proud of it, too!" he instructed me to respond if it were ever to happen again, his voice rising in anger. Judaism was no longer just my religion, but a part of me at risk for attack.

I remember feeling, at that moment, my connection to Judaism deepen.

I HAVE FEW childhood memories of my afternoons at Hebrew school. I remember the classroom, the blackboard, the hard, uncomfortable chairs, and the hunger, as often I hadn't eaten a sufficient after-school snack. I went long enough to learn the Hebrew alphabet and count to 10. But just as I was beginning to learn the *V'ahavta* for my bat mitzvah, my parents divorced and my father moved back to the Northeast.

The commitments they had made to each other as part of their marriage dissolved, and although my father traveled to Israel, became a bar mitzvah at the Kotel as an adult and sent me postcards from Eilat exalting our Judaism, his ability to influence my upbringing became limited. My parents decided together to discontinue our family's synagogue membership, and my bat mitzvah preparation came to an end.

But I had memorized and could recite the *V'ahavta*—I could speak the Hebrew words that contained the commandments to "love God with all of my heart, soul, and might." *V'shinan'tam l'vanekha v'dibar'ta bam*—the translation simple at the time, not yet swollen with meaning: my commitment to teach the commandments of God diligently to my children and to speak of them throughout my days.

Because my mother felt strongly that her children should have religion, regardless of which, she—and my new Southern, Protestant stepfather—started taking us every Sunday to a Methodist church. I daydreamed through the services but soon could recite the Lord's Prayer and certain hymns by heart. Too self-conscious to sit in silence and draw attention to myself, I read and sang aloud with everyone, but never uttered the words "Jesus Christ." I would also take our seder plate to my Sunday school class every Passover and explain that I was half-Jewish.

"Which half?" my classmates asked.

"This one," I said, drawing a vertical line in the air down the middle of my body and then holding up my right hand.

DURING THE YEARS that followed, holding onto my Jewish identity remained my steadfast desire, despite my participation in Christian youth groups (with my friends) and my complete lack of Jewish education. More than a religion, Judaism had become my quiet connection to my father, who maintained a synagogue membership in his new hometown despite celebrating Christmas with his new Catholic wife. How funny to think of myself as that rare child who wished that Christmas (in both her parents' houses) would disappear! The absence of a decorated tree, no chain of lights or glistening tinsel—this would mean that I was Jewish. That I was home.

I was that rare child who wished that Christmas (in both her parents' houses) would disappear.

AS AN ADULT, I started to educate myself, taking *Intro to Judaism* in college, making Jewish friends, dating Jewish men, and sitting at their families' seder tables. I attended medical school at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine of Yeshiva University in the Bronx, surrounded myself with Orthodox Jewish students and teachers, and learned as much about the practice of Judaism as the anatomy of the human being.

There I met my husband, Eric, the son of two Jewish parents, and I took part in a Conservative conversion to satisfy the rabbi who would marry us. He arranged for us to arrive one weekday morning at an address on the Upper West Side, and we were greeted by four rabbis seated in a semicircle, each with a white beard and black suit.

"We understand that you were, in fact, raised Jewish for much of your childhood and that you consider yourself to be

Jewish already, is that right?" the rabbi to my right asked.

I nodded, unnerved.

"So we won't quiz you as we would a person who was not raised in a Jewish home, okay? Instead, you'll dunk in the *mikvah*, and we'll consider your conversion complete."

I was directed into another room, a dressing room, where I was instructed to remove my clothes, put on a thick terrycloth bathrobe, and then enter another room where a woman would be waiting for me. This room contained a miniature tiled, heated pool. A small woman who wore a head covering, and seemed to speak little English, gestured for me to remove the robe and descend the stairs into the pool, completely submerging my naked body. When I raised my head to breathe, she waved me over to the side and placed her hands on my head, reciting a prayer in Hebrew. She brought the robe to the top of the stairs, and I put it on, got dressed, and rejoined the rabbis and Eric.

"*Mazel tov*, Miriam!" the rabbis cheered in unison, handing me my conversion certificate printed with my official Hebrew name. They each shook my hand. My hair still wet, we left the building and traveled home, happy to have this technicality addressed and the ambiguity behind us.

I was Jewish. Again.

"L'CHAIM!"

We were married under a *chuppah*, complete with the shattering of glass under Eric's foot. From my son's bris and my daughter's baby-naming, to Jewish preschools, playgroups and camps, our children have never questioned their family's religion. Once my four-year-old daughter was in a toy store, sifting through a pile of velvet cardboards, each with its own design. As she picked up each one, she recited its name:

"Hooorse, rainbowwww, unicooooorn, Godddd…"

I stopped her. Who was she calling *God*?

"May I see the picture?" I asked, and she pulled out one with the face of Santa Claus.

"Isn't that Santa Claus?" I asked.

"No," she said, smiling. "It's God."

I was immediately brought back to the years when I wished that Christmas in my own childhood home would disappear. And now, to my amazement, my four-year-old daughter didn't even know who

VICTORIOUS JEWISH MOMENTS

in owning an abusive biblical text.

by ROBERT A. LOWE & PAM CROW

EVERY YEAR IN SYNAGOGUE, we hear the story of Hannah, a childless woman who was taunted by her husband's other wife, Peninah, for being infertile. Like most of the stories in Hebrew Scriptures, the narrative is extravagantly spare, and the spareness allows the readers to connect the dots, to align circumstances in one's own life to texts that have been handed down through millennia.

Archetypes live on: We see Hannah's humiliation and Eli's misjudgment in ourselves, our parents and our friends.

In the Bible story, we see Hannah praying—fervently, desperately—and Eli the Priest mistaking her spiritual intensity for drunkenness.

"How long will you make a spectacle of yourself? Sober up!" Eli tells her.

"You are mistaken," Hannah replies. "I have drunk no wine or other strong drink. I am an unhappy woman, pouring out my heart to God."

"Then go in peace," Eli says, chastened. "And may God grant you what you ask."

WHEN CONGREGATION P'NAI OR in Portland, Oregon, asked the two of us—we're friends—to deliver a commentary on this story, we realized that the narrative left us with a lot of questions. How did Hannah *feel* when the High Priest of Shiloh didn't "see" her? How did Eli feel, realizing he had shamed a woman already crushed with pain?

As we talked more, we recognized that these archetypes live on. We see Hannah's humiliation and Eli's misjudgment in ourselves, our parents, and our acquaintances. The point of the Hannah and Eli story, after all, is that it's still with us.

1954: BOB REMEMBERS

The women's psychiatric ward, the locked section, smelled of both disinfectant and unflushed toilets. Even in the middle

Santa Claus was, much less wish that he would visit our house.

Yet she had an image in her mind of the face of God—full beard, kind eyes, and a warm smile. For me, it was a moment of satisfaction.

MY DAUGHTER IS facing the rabbi in front of the ark, six scrolls of Torah watching over them, their metal crowns and plates glistening from the *ner tamid*. The rabbi is offering her private words, meant only for her, and the cantorial soloist is singing from Debbie Friedman's *Lechi Lach*, a reference to my daughter's Torah portion:

L'chi lach, *to a land that I will show you*
Leich l'cha, *to a place you do not know*
L'chi lach, *on your journey I will bless you*
And you shall be a blessing, l'chi lach.

The rabbi places his hands flatly on my daughter's head, blessing her. We are standing, my father's arms wrapped around my shoulders as tears flow down my cheeks. It was a long-interrupted journey, one that somehow wound around and came back to find the two of us together at this moment, side by side.

How likely was it that I would follow through with the *V'ahavta* that I had learned all those years ago? *V'shinan'tam l'vanekha*: a commitment to teach the commandments of God diligently to my children and speak of them throughout my days.

I HAVE SEARCHED for lingering feelings of envy, fueled by the resentment I experienced reciting the Lord's Prayer on those Sundays at church while my Jewish friends continued their religious educations. Why aren't I jealous of my daughter for taking that place on the bimah, a place I had fervently wanted to take when I was 13?

Instead, rather than envy I feel a great deal of success as a Jewish parent. I set out to raise children without religious confusion, and I have done so. Ultimately, I have come to believe that *this* was my charge. My daughter has joined the ranks of those who can read. Although I can't, she can. She is one of them. ■

Marty Ross-Dolen is a child and adolescent psychiatrist currently staying home, in Bexley, Ohio, to raise her two children. She writes creative nonfiction and volunteers in her community.

of the night, the flickering fluorescent lights in the hall and dayroom shone into the patients' rooms, interfering with sleep, as did the shouts and wall-banging of a new patient in the holding area.

A woman walked down the hall, her short, greying hair uncombed, the puffiness around her eyes hinting at lack of sleep. Something she carried jingled as she walked.

The night nurse spied her. "Give me those keys," she said.

"I need them," replied the disheveled woman.

The nurse stood in front of the woman, arms crossed. "Patients can't have keys."

The woman stood firm. "I'm not a patient. I'm the doctor."

"Yeah, right." The nurse reached out her hand. "Give me the keys!"

The disheveled woman was the psychiatrist on call, just awakened to evaluate the new patient. It felt like a long time before another nurse arrived, recognized her, and convinced the night nurse that the doctor on call was indeed not a man, but a woman. *This* woman.

This is the story of my mother, a daughter of Hannah.

1965: PAM REMEMBERS

The doctor wore a white coat and tie. He sat behind his polished wooden desk as he lectured the female patient. With the door of his office open, his words spilled out into the crowded waiting room:

"It's not unusual for bored housewives to have these kinds of symptoms."

Oh, she thought. The excruciating headaches, the intermittent blindness—all imagined.

Exhausted from feeling ill and now unsure of herself, she left his office feeling hopeless and in despair.

Fortunately, the "bored housewife"—who worked full-time as a psychologist while raising two children—found the courage to consult a specialist. He diagnosed toxoplasmosis, a rare parasitic infection that had caused scar tissue to damage her eyes and to press on the nerves in her face.

This is the story of my mother, a daughter of Hannah.

1987: PAM

In her boss's car on the way back from the meeting, she tried to gulp down her coffee before the traffic light turned green. Wanting to create the appearance of confidence and maturity, she was wearing her favorite scarf, its rich shades of blue complementing her grey pants suit. Her boss peeled away from the light and the coffee spilled on her suit and the car's upholstery. Stammering an apology, she tried to wipe the seat with her scarf. Her boss pulled the car over, grabbing some tissues to complete the cleanup. Then he reached for her hand, trapping it against his thigh.

"You're so sweet. We really should spend more time together. You know I have a cabin at Sunriver?" He leaned toward her, his wedding ring, as always, unmistakable.

She was the coordinator of their sexual-assault treatment program, teaching children and adults about their right to say "No!" to any unwanted touch.

"You're propositioning me," she replied, calmly, but firmly. "That's not acceptable behavior."

Or, rather, that's what she thought about later. At the time, startled, she just mumbled something about being busy.

This is the story of a daughter of Hannah, a tongue-tied daughter who remained silent when Eli spoke. This is my story.

2007: BOB

He sits at his computer with the study door closed, working on a research report. Although it is 10PM, he is still wearing slacks from his day at the university; when he got home he had only taken time to remove his tie and unbutton the top button of his shirt. He cracks his neck to try to relieve the pain from three uninterrupted hours of statistical analysis and manuscript typing.

The culmination of four years of work, this manuscript is important: it will document how Medicaid cutbacks hurt the most vulnerable in our society. He hopes it will make a difference.

He tries to shut out the noise of his wife's telephone conversation down the hall. Esther is also an academic physician. Hearing her chattering heightens his chronic annoyance with her; in an academic world where publications and grants are the measures of success, it seems that all she does is talk and email. And he doesn't see how her long phone conversations will impact the health of the public she wants to serve.

When he finally comes to bed after midnight, she is already asleep. He places a pillow as a barrier between them. As he tries to sleep, he grinds his teeth thinking about her time-wasting.

This is my story, the story of a son of Eli.

***Her boss reached for her hand, trapping it against his thigh....* This is the story of a daughter of Hannah, a tongue-tied daughter who remained silent when Eli spoke. This is my story.**

TODAY: BOB

Through those phone calls and emails Esther has developed a rich network of collaborators. She has been promoted to the rank of professor and heads a nationally-recognized Center of Excellence. She leads a team of physicians, researchers and staff members. A dozen faculty members view her as their mentor. Her advice is sought by legislators and other policymakers, and her work affects women throughout the United States.

As I came to recognize Esther for who she is, I saw a woman whose talents are different from mine but whose strengths are many. My vision has cleared, and when my beloved looks into my eyes, she sees that clarity and respect for her. When we go to bed at night, she reaches out to me with confidence. Sometimes we make love.

This is the story of a daughter of Hannah who stayed on her true path, just as Hannah corrected Eli, saying, "You are mistaken."

And she has opened the eyes of this son of Eli.

AS THE TWO OF US felt our way into the eternality of this biblical story, we shared these insights with our congregation, along with this prayer:

May we be blessed to stand in the Temple with the daughters of Hannah. May we hold hands with those whose tongues cannot form words, with those who say "Yes" because their "No" has never been an option.

May we build our lives of such breath and music that when the High Priest orders us to leave, our feet are roots and our hearts open flowers.

May we hear Hannah's words, "You are mistaken," as a loving declaration of strength. And may that declaration open our eyes to healing, love, and peace.

Amen. ■

Robert A. Lowe is an emergency physician and a published poet. A commentary of his on Hebrew Scripture has been published in Drash: Northwest Mosaic.

Pam Crow is a clinical social worker living in Portland, OR. She won the National Astraea Award for Emerging Lesbian Writers in 1996, and is the author of a book of poetry, Inside This House.

at a hard-won seder.

by SUSAN MOLDAW

I WAS PICKING OUT grapes at the market on a last-minute errand before Passover when I heard someone say in a lilting, foreign accent: "It's hard work to harvest grapes."

I looked up. The voice came from a gnarled, elderly woman with sunken eyes and a gaunt face. She wore a gray dress and a purple knit shawl knotted around bony shoulders.

"Yes," I said, hoping she would go about her business so I could go about mine. "Being a farmer is hard work."

"But grapes—grapes are especially hard work," she insisted, bending lower to the fruit and picking out a bunch. "I should know. I was a slave laborer when I was a girl."

I stopped bagging my grapes. She straightened up.

"It was in Poland during the war," she said. "I'm Jewish. I got papers and hid my identity. A family took me and I worked for them, harvesting the grapes. Oh, it's hard work, let me tell you. You must twist each strand to the fence, and if you make a mistake, so much money is lost." She shook her head. "I lost my parents in Auschwitz and Treblinka. My sister and I, we worked with false papers. One day the Germans came. The family told them, 'There's no Jews here,' so the Germans left. But they came back. 'We know you've got Jews,' they said to the family. But the father put them off again and they told us: 'Run away! Run away before they come back tomorrow!' That's how they saved us. We ran."

By now I was in thrall to her voice and her story. People stretched their arms in front of us for grapes, circled their carts around us to reach bananas. Passover and Easter coincided that year and the market was swarming. Bob, my partner, waved from the nearby apple bin, as if to say: "What's up?" Barely looking at him, I shook my head.

"Have you told anyone?" I asked. "Have you recorded this?"

"No. I can't talk about it. I'm crying now. You see, I'm crying."

She hunched and pulled her shawl more tightly. Breaking out of a sudden spell, I reached out and patted her.

"I'm glad you're telling me." I didn't know what else to say, so I asked if she had children.

"I have two children and three grandchildren," she said, brightening.

An ending! I thought. A happy one.

"So that's how you'll have continuity," I said.

"Yes. That's what my son says. We carry on through our children."

It was getting late. In a few hours I'd be gathering with friends and family for a seder. We'd eat the traditional meal and recount the Passover story: how God led the Jews from lives of slavery in Egypt to lives of freedom.

I touched her arm warmly and thanked her for talking to me. As she walked toward the vegetables, I heard her saying, over and over: "I'm crying now."

"What's going on?" Bob asked as I joined him in the checkout line next to carts laden with matzo for Passover and chocolate for Easter.

"She lived through the Holocaust," I said. "She told me her story."

EXACTLY NINE YEARS before that Passover, my husband and I observed our last seder together with our 14-year-old triplet sons and our parents.

A week earlier, my husband had coolly informed me that he was inviting his religion-averse parents, who had never attended our seders. He and I, at that point, slept in separate bedrooms. He wouldn't move out. I wouldn't move out. The in-laws—who had hated each other for years—weren't speaking.

Our house abutted the synagogue we belonged to. Every Friday night, our back playroom was suffused with the glow of the temple's stained-glass windows, bringing holy light into our unholy situation. Hyperventilating at the thought of our two families at the seder together,

I decided—last minute—to dilute the impending catastrophe by inviting my sons' sweet *b'nai mitzvah* Hebrew tutor, Natan, as well as my friend Samantha and her son, Jimmy.

I had prepared as I always did, because shopping for the seder meal, cooking it and setting the table were the only aspects of the evening that I could have the way I wanted.

We were Reform—though my husband wasn't Jewish—and though we never removed the *hametz*, or leaven, from the house or did a thorough spring cleaning as custom dictated, I wanted my children to have the memory of celebrating Passover. Of course, I wanted more than that.

I wanted us to loudly sing *Had Gadya*, *Eliyahu Hanavi*, and *Dayenu*. I wanted everyone to pound on the table when we recited the plagues. I wanted the boys to recline lavishly in their chairs and jump up and down looking for the *Afikomen*. I wanted to share Passover stories and debate how the holiday informed gay rights and feminist liberation. My husband's intimidating presence, however, squelched all of this.

The menu that evening is still tucked inside my 1976 *Settlement Cookbook*, along with all the other Passover menus for the years we celebrated together: 1995 through 2003. They're handwritten on notepads filched from hotels where my husband and I stayed before we had children, and after, when we stayed as a family.

Mauna Kea Beach Hotel
Passover 2003

matzo ball soup
radish
parsley
egg
shank bone
gefilte fish
matzo
chopped liver
haroses (no horseradish)
roast chicken
carrot kugel
noodle kugel (p. 187)
roast carrots (p. 417)
wine
honey cake
candy fruit slices
macaroons

One year I added homemade matzo apple pudding (p.194). Another year I served asparagus with hazelnut dressing and rosemary chicken breasts—recipes I learned from a Passover cooking class at Judith Ets-Hokin, a culinary store in San Francisco's Laurel Village.

For this last Passover we had all the usual foodstuffs, but Natan brought the chicken, Samantha made the matzo ball soup, and I added that carrot kugel as well as a noodle kugel—as though abundance would bring happiness.

When I set the table in the dining room (instead of the kitchen) to accommodate the extra guests, I used place cards to seat my husband and his parents at one end, and my parents and me at the other, separated by the boys and our guests. I covered the matzo plate with tie-dyed, red-blue-and-green cloths the boys had made in their Jewish pre-school. Silver candlesticks held the blue and white beeswax candles they'd also made. I put *A Children's Haggadah* at each place setting, as I did each year, having decided years earlier that the kiddy version suited our family's level of ritual tolerance.

FORTIFIED BY MY parents' on-time arrival and the sight of their steely, determined faces—expressions that predicted the evening's inevitable hell, but were also a buffer for whatever shape our disaster might take—I hurried them to the kitchen and presented my father with his customary Gray Goose vodka from the freezer. I placed a good crystal glass on the counter.

Smoothing her trim, navy wool dress, my mother watched my father pour two shots and add ice.

"Just one," she said disapprovingly.

"No, two," he replied. "I'm going to need it."

I wanted a rollicking, happy Passover, but I also wanted it to be over as soon as possible. In that latter hope, my husband and I were one. He had no feeling for the holiday at all except to be able to state that he'd done it. That evening he planned to blast out with the boys for a fishing trip to Baja.

From the kitchen, I heard the front door slam and my mother-in-law's big, trademark guffaw. I went to the front hall to greet her and my father-in-law, determined to stay above the fray. My mother-in-law was wearing a purple-netted hat and black polka-dot stockings; she gave me a cool look of hate.

I wanted a rollicking, happy Passover, but I also wanted it to be over as soon as possible.

My husband produced a bottle of red wine and shepherded his parents into the living room (away from my parents in the kitchen) where he immediately poured his father a drink. He knew I hated serving anything in that room because carpet stains there were always indelible.

Then Natan, the balding, mild-mannered, tall and lumbering Hebrew tutor arrived—all innocence—carrying a large platter heaping with roasted chicken. My husband, wrongly certain I was having an affair with this man, nodded knowingly to his parents.

Samantha and her son arrived soon after, Jimmy scooting off with my sons to flock around Natan in the family room off the kitchen, where our side had camped. Samantha gave me a huggy look. Her ex-husband had landed in jail on drug charges, so scenes like this were not unfamiliar.

Inviting everyone into the dining room, my husband and I took antipodal seats at the long mahogany table, as we had once upon a time, more happily, presided over dinner parties. We didn't make eye contact. We opened our Haggadot and I called on each person to recite a prayer or read a part of the Passover story, everyone dutifully complying except my mother-in-law, who looked up when I said her name and simply said "No." My father rolled his eyes.

The Haggadah recitation mercifully eliminated the need for actual conversation, as did the fact that we served and ate the entire meal while we read. As soon as we hit the final page, my husband leapt up and rushed the boys upstairs to get their packs for the fishing trip.

My in-laws made for the door. Samantha started clearing the table. My parents went to the living room and sat on the couch while I got Natan a plastic container to take home leftovers. As I walked him to the door to say goodbye, we heard screaming from upstairs. An army-green duffel flew over the bannister and landed with a thud. Then my husband marched down the stairs gripping one son, both of them scowling. The other two boys trailed with lowered heads, packs strapped to their bodies. Samantha emerged from the kitchen, crossed her arms, and watched.

"Get the duffel," my husband ordered.

Their frames laden, the boys crossed into the living room to say goodbye to my parents, then moved to plant a quick kiss on my cheek.

"Move it," my husband said.

Natan, the gentle bear, was still standing at the door clutching his chicken platter and the bag of leftovers. My husband gave him an enraged look, and with a quick, frightened glance at me, he fled.

They all tumbled out, and I let out a breath, resolved to call poor Natan to apologize the following day.

Samantha put an arm around my shoulder.

"What the hell," she said.

NINE YEARS LATER to the day, I met the elderly survivor over grapes at the supermarket. My mother and I went to seder at the home of friends. My boys were now in college, in New York, Boulder and L.A., and my father had died.

We arrived at the same time as another guest, a woman I knew from my book group. She was dressed and coifed beautifully, as always—her Chanel suit hitting just at her knees and her navy pumps neither too high nor too flat. She gave me a hug and said somberly, "I'm getting a divorce." I thought: *What a long way I've come through the desert.*

I opened my Haggadah and our host covered her head with a white lace mantle and lit the candles. I looked through the dining room's sheer white curtains, saw the street lamps coming on, and had a deep *shehechiyanu* moment—so grateful for this place and this time.

Drinking from the first cup of wine, I thanked God for the 20 of us gathered around the table. At the second cup, I gave thanks for my children, my parents, and my new partner Bob. At the third, I thanked God for granting me the courage to leave my "Egypt"—the prison of an unhappy marriage.

And when I drank wine from the fourth cup, I offered thanks for the elderly apparition in the fruit aisle earlier that day—perhaps she was Elijah—whose story and person pulled me into Passover's essence: the journey through deserts, the guiderails of family and tradition, and the fiery presence of *l'dor vador*—generation to generation. We are never too old, I suddenly recognized, and it's never too late to forge one's destiny.

"I'm crying now" surely also includes tears of redemption. ■

Susan Moldaw works as a chaplain in San Francisco. Her writing has appeared in Literary Mama, Narrative, the anthology tell me again, *and Brain, Child.*

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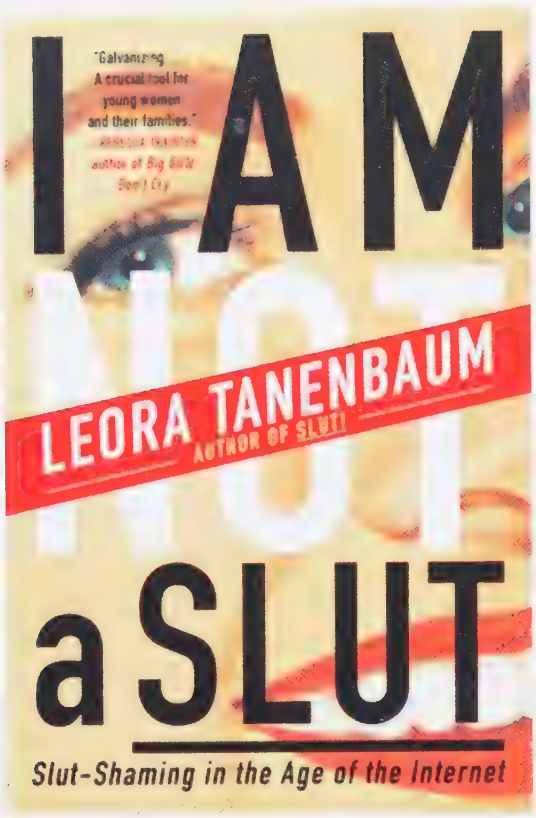


Why "I Am Not a Slut" Sounds Familiar

Girls and young women do a delicate dance between feeling sexual in a positive way and being shamed/blamed for expressing any part of that sexuality, even for giving the appearance of acting on it. There's the good slut and the bad slut, according to Leora Tanenbaum.

In between, even with the jokiness of the term "slut" being bandied about by girls as a term of endearment, you're shamed—as one of Tanenbaum's teen subjects in her book *I Am Not a Slut* says—both for being a "prude" and for being a "whore."

There's an eerily familiar dynamic here. When women's options become squeezed like this, when the field where you can operate safe from shame and baiting gets narrowed by disparaging accusations at each end, when the playing field for "appropriate" behaviors shrinks and shrinks, we see female behaviors getting strictly controlled. We see this clearly in a precursor slur—the JAP, the much-maligned and much-discussed Jewish American Princess.

Let's revisit the JAP for a moment. In her current incarnation she is sometimes called by another name, as in the "Coasties" song popular on Midwestern campuses a few season ago, where young women thought to be of privileged backgrounds are mocked for being spoiled, wearing brand-name garments, spending "Daddy's money," etc.

Among the salient characteristics of the JAP—that she is emotionally dishonest, materially indulged, sexually withholding—there are paradoxes similar to those closing in on the slut. The JAP is the female who is both too passive (wants someone else to support her financially, to indulge her in her whims and moods) and also the female who is too assertive, who wants to make it on her own, who is outspoken, privileged, and wants, as one decades-old analysis put it, "the best of everything." If we look at today's slut through the designer sunglasses of the JAP, we see that the slut, too, is in the procrustean situation of being damned both for action and for inaction. She's shamed if she expresses her sexuality, but if she does not, she is judged to be withholding, prudish, unpopular or—maybe even worse—"irrelevant," as one girl put it to Tanenbaum.

We know about this squeeze from an even earlier example than the JAP. The mythological Lilith, eponym for this magazine, was in the initial stories a strong, bold creature of God, formed at the same instant and from the same dust as Adam. Intended as his equal, his peer, she fled the Garden of Eden when Adam insisted that he was her superior. That's the nugget of the original story. Fast forward into the Medieval period, when Lilith suddenly gets a bad press. She is simultaneously frigid and a seducer of men who walk alone into dark houses at night; she's simultaneously sterile and gives birth to 100 demon children every day. And so on. Lilith, like the JAP and the slut, ends up as the embodiment of contradictory—untenably contradictory—ideas about female behavior and attributes. Too passive and also too assertive, too manipulative and too direct, too cold and too hot. The prude and the slut. It's an old story.

The margins get stifling, they pull in tighter and tighter. The constricting paradox of this double message—like "be smart but not too smart"—is the corset of the 21st century. It's all about control. No wonder it sounds familiar. ■

Susan Weidman Schneider

Girls Now: The Prude/Slut Contradiction

GIRLS' AND WOMEN'S experiences illuminate an unstable terrain in which female sexual development is fraught with tricks and traps. It's not an accident, I believe, that the words "slut" and "ho" [for whore] are popular at the same time that adolescent girls and college-age women face a sexual contradiction of enormous significance. Repeatedly, my interviewees explained that they must prove to their peers that they are sexually sophisticated and knowing. Revealing oneself as a "prude" or sexually ignorant—for girls as well as boys—is the kiss of social death.

It means not keeping up, not developing properly, not being normal. Therefore, many girls and young women deliberately construct an identity in which they perform as a sexually empowered female to an audience of their peers, just as many boys and young men feel pressured by norms of masculinity to brag about sexual adventures.

Stephanie, a white 15-year-old girl in New York City, relates that she was called a prude when she was in the seventh grade, "when I had braces and everything. I had a really cute boyfriend, and we just hung out and didn't do anything. Kids asked me if we'd kissed, and I said no, and they were like, 'What?' So they said I was a prude. And so I became so irrelevant." (Instead of judging their peers on a scale of popularity and unpopularity, I discovered, teens deem them "relevant" or "irrelevant," also described as being "under the radar.") Stephanie continues, saying, "If you're part of a group that cares about hooking up, and you're not hooking up, then you become irrelevant." Stephanie did not want to be rendered "irrelevant." Who does—especially when you're 15 years old?

THIS CONTRADICTION is a modification of the virgin/whore dichotomy that has plagued women since the third millennium BCE, when the ancient Sumerians divided women into the categories of wife and prostitute. Historically, two mutually exclusive sexual identities—sexually inexperienced wife/Madonna figure who engages in sexual behavior only to procreate with her husband; and sexually experienced woman/prostitute who engages in sexual behavior only for personal benefit—were available to women to embrace. This virgin/whore dichotomy gave women no space to express their sexuality without consequences.

…Never mind that being a "slut" is one hair away from performing in a socially acceptable manner. Once a girl is labeled a slut, the show is over: her performance is ruined; her reputation is in tatters.

We judge other female bodies, and our female bodies are always judged.

SOCIAL MEDIA HAVE profoundly altered the way people evaluate themselves and others. In particular, social media place girls' and women's physical bodies perpetually on display. Julie Zeilinger, the founder and editor of a feminist blog for teens and young adults called *FBomb*, observes, "Everyone is constantly visible and available—including your body and everything else about you." Moreover, many of us believe today that our bodies *should* always be visible and available. We judge other female bodies, and our female bodies are always judged. Therefore, we worry about our physical selves and our sexual identities in a newly charged way. Performance and surveillance are now central to everyone's lives, and especially so for young females.

BECAUSE THE WORD "slut" has become so accepted and widespread in casual conversation, its sexist sting is undervalued in U.S. youth culture. As the high school teacher played by Tina Fey memorably told her female students in the 2004 movie *Mean Girls*, "You all have got to stop calling each other sluts and whores. It just makes it OK for guys to call you sluts and whores." The more the word is used, the more it is accepted. When women call each other sluts, even in a lighthearted manner, they lead others to believe it's acceptable to use the term too. When this behavior is normalized, so is sexual assault. As Kaitlyn says, "I pretty much expect to be groped and touched by random guys every time I leave my home in the morning. Girls think it's normal for a guy to grab them at a party. The word 'slut' creates a physically and emotionally dangerous environment for girls." ■

From I Am Not a Slut *by Leora Tanenbaum (HarperCollins, 2015).*
Used with permission of the publisher.

Sex and the Jewish Girl

Leora Tanenbaum's *I Am Not a Slut* has nothing overtly Jewish in it. In fact, Tanenbaum told Lilith that she interviewed no Jewish girls and women in her reporting. But her new book raises issues that resonate for feminist Jews. Susan Weidman Schneider has some questions for Tanenbaum.

SWS: When you discuss the pressure felt by girls and young women to present themselves in a certain way—and the criticism and shame they experience when they do—I was reminded of Lilith's reports on the evergreen "JAP" phenomenon. Both stereotypes embody the persistent paradoxes in the messages girls and young women get: "Look good, attract guys," on the one hand, and on the other, "You are too obsessed with what you look like/too sexually obvious." Do you see a connection between slut-bashing and JAP-bashing?

LT: The paradox is alive and well. Girls are supposed to present themselves as sexually knowing and sophisticated, yet when and if they do they're judged and shamed and policed. They're supposed to be sexy, but not slutty.

It's this impossible scenario where you *have to fail* if you are a teenage girl and you have overreached and crossed the invisible and constantly shifting boundary. I do see how the "JAP" and the "slut" align.

We think of Jewish parents typically raising their daughters to have agency, to "Be all you can be." And yet a young woman runs the risk of being damned for being too assertive, and also for being too passive. "Damned if you want to be the doctor, damned if you want to marry a doctor," is how one woman put it.

But of course what we're not doing a good job of as parents is telling our daughters that their agency is only *partial*. How can we tell them they can do anything they want when this is not true! It plays out with devastating consequences.

The problem with focusing on girls' *agency* without revealing how partial it is, is reflected in the dominant reflex response to sexual assault: "You must have done something wrong. You chose to dress that way, you chose to drink. You made those free-will decisions."

Boys and men are expected to be sexually active in an uncontrolled manner, but girls and women are punished for behaving this way. We don't want to curb our daughters' sexuality, but we want to show them that we have contested beliefs, culturally, about what is appropriate.

A bar or bat mizvah party *could* be a safe occasion for healthy adolescent experiment. A girl can play around with wardrobe and makeup. But what if she feels her sexuality is her primary source of power?

Try to find a compromise—but *never, ever* shame your daughter about her body or her appearance. Say: "You look great in that outfit. Unfortunately, so many people in the larger world believe that these clothing choices say something else about you. They are 100% wrong. But we have to keep those people in mind in order to stay safe."

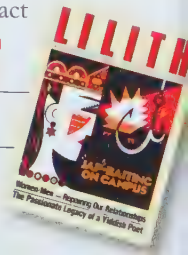
Can we speculate about a Jewish dimension to the slut-bashing, slut-shaming, slut-denying you write about? What about the sexualization of girls at bar and bat mitzvah parties? Aside from the covert sexual behavior at some of these parties, which Lilith reported on in "It's Not Sex!" [Winter 2003–2004], what about the often precociously sexy clothing of these 13-year-old girls, and the subsequent disapprobation heaped upon them by the adults who present themselves similarly?

A bar or bat mitzvah party could be a *safe* occasion for healthy adolescent and pre-adolescent experiment—play around with wardrobe and makeup. Playing around with sexually revealing clothes does not bother me. The problem is this: Does she feel she has to wear such a dress? And does she feel her sexuality is her primary source of power in the world? It's problematic if this is the direction this goes in.

What about, at the other end of the spectrum, the message that girls get in many Jewish settings, that their bodies are sources of danger and temptation to boys: Tzniut! Modesty! And what about a "modesty" that trammels girls' sexual feelings?

I'm a day school graduate myself. In Flatbush Yeshiva, the very act of having a stringent dress code was an act of policing a girl's sexuality. ■

VISIT LILITH.ORG for the landmark articles on "JAP-baiting."



EXCUSE ME #11

LIANA FINCK ANSWERS YOUR TINY QUESTIONS.

how to make small talk

1. SAY ANYTHING.
COLD?
YA.
2. SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT: SPEECH OCCURS WHEN WIND PASSES THROUGH THE VOCAL FOLDS. OTHER HUMAN SOUNDS INCLUDE SINGING, SHOUTING, GROANING, AND CRYING. WORDS ARE SOUNDS TO WHICH WE ASSIGN RANDOM MEANINGS. ONE THING YOU SHOULD NOT DO IS LAUGH. YOU MUST NOT LAUGH.
3. TERMINATE EYE CONTACT.
4. THE MIND CONTAINS CHEMICALS THAT WILL MAKE YOU BOTH FORGET THIS HAPPENED.

Liana Finck's graphic novel is A Bintel Brief. *She writes and draws a monthly column for The Forward and her cartoons appear irregularly in The New Yorker. Her graphic blog—"Excuse Me"—appears regularly at Lilith.org/blog.*

ABOUT Those Canaanite Sandals THAT HAV

Walking the Narrative of Zionism

by SUSAN SCHNUR

In the 2nd century C.E., a widow named Bavta bat Simon, fleeing Roman persecution, hid in a cave in the Judean Desert. She brought a lot of stuff with her to this cave—letters, real estate documents, cosmetics—and when the trove was discovered, after almost 2000 years, by the renowned Israeli archeologist Yigael Yadin in 1960, one of Bavta's belongings—a filthy humble sandal—became instantly famous. Comprised of a three-layer leather sole held together by a spare, between-the-toes strap, it found its way into the Holiest of Holies: that is, a glass display case in the Shrine of the Book at the Israel Museum, where it resides to this day. [See illustration.] It also embarked on a second career traveling the world in exhibitions. So much for careers that languish for only a decade.

In 1966, five years after Yigael Yadin's discovery of Bavta's trove, a shoemaker and shoe designer in Tel Aviv named Josef Rosenblith (whose grandfather Zvi had cobbled shoes in Galicia, and whose father Kalman had done likewise in Poland, then Holland, then Palestine)—and who had registered a shoe company in Palestine in 1944 called Nimrod, Ltd.—published a Nimrod catalog that featured a photo of Bavta's 2nd-century sandal as well as a photo of an almost identical sandal that Rosenblith had designed. [See illustration.]

The copy was genius: "One must admit the resemblance between this ancient sandal and those worn by the style-conscious young Israeli Sabra," it read. Bavta's sandal, it seems to me, could plausibly be the progenitor of shabby-chic, the fashion rage that originated in the U.S. in the 1990s.

Four years later, in 1970, Rosenblith pushed the concept further in a catalog that featured an illustration of Bar Kokhba, the famous Jewish military hero of the 2nd century C.E., wrenching open the mouth of a lion while wearing sandals. The text simply proclaimed: "From the Land of the Sandal."

Rosenblith, who at some point changed his surname to Ben Artzi ["Son of My Land"] and then just Artzi ["My Land"], had essentially "branded," through the marketing of a shoe, the narrative of Zionism and its linearity: from the foundational myths of the biblical era, through the abject centuries of Jewish exile, and finally to the triumphant return of Jews to Palestine and that real estate's kinetic, teleological evolution into the sovereign State of Israel. All a shopper had to do—to find and assert her rightful place in this grand, sweeping arc of history—was buy a pair of sandals.

Tamar El Or, an anthropologist at Hebrew University, writes about the "biblical sandal" in an article in The American Anthropologist. Growing up in Tel Aviv in the 1950s and '60s, El Or states that Nimrod sandals were part of her everyday attire, but El Or's ethnographic research, for 25 years, concerned "narratives"—the stories of Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Israeli women—not "material culture." In the early 21st century, however, anthropological scholarship took an "ontological turn" towards the study of objects, and El Or suddenly looked down and saw that what Israeli women put on their feet, and have for decades—well, actually for millennia—was worthy of study.

She devoted three years to researching and assembling the object's biography: from studying the history of footwear in the ancient Near East, to reading canonical Jewish texts, and even to taking a footwear-making course at the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in Jerusalem.

Mostly, though, El Or focused on interviewing the members of Josef Rosenblith's family, as well as designers from the family's company, Nimrod. The company has no official archive, but Josef's descendants—Oren, Liora, and Tzafi—were happy to open disorderly kitchen drawers and unpack random boxes in attics to unearth photos, newspaper clippings, personal documents, letters, and catalogs. Though El Or's work was scholarly and therefore, she felt, should be approached with curatorial gloves and frowning-brow inquiries, the truth was, she says, the process was spirited, with Josef's progeny turning out to be warmhearted, open, and fun.

Jewish sandals, it turns out, were first produced in Palestine on kibbutzim in the early 1930s. The Mediterranean sunshine, kibbutzniks' limited financial resources, and the reigning social-

PHOTO ASOS.

BEEN in Your Closet for 2,000 Years

Above, Bavta bat Simon's 2,000-year-old sandal; on display in the Shrine of the Book at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Below, a replica of Bavta's sandal made by Nimrod, Ltd., in a catalog from 1965.

ist ideologies—utilitarianism, egalitarianism, physicality, and simplicity—made the invention of these sandals seem almost ineluctable: conventional shoes, after all, were overwrought for the kibutzniks' lifestyle and purposes, and thongs (or flip-flops), the ultimate reduction, were uncomfortable for wear over socks on cooler days and inappropriate for physical labor (though they were good, as are most sandals, for shaking your foot and easily dislodging stones or sand).

This "kibbutz sandal," though, was not like the between-the-toes-strap sandal of Bavta bat Simon. Instead, it was made with *horizontal* straps—two of them—with a third, thinner strap that wrapped around the ankle. [See illustration p. 34.] This sandal became the dominant mid-20th-century style, though it carried, unlike Rosenblith's Bavta-like design, no historical resonance—at least not in Palestine (or later, Israel). Conversely, in Central Europe, an almost identical style was a known form called the "Jesus *Latchen*," which certainly suggests that biblical-origin thing.

On the kibbutz, the eponymous sandal was, simply, exactly what it was: footwear that resident shoemakers made and resident kibbutzniks wore because there were no alternatives. The kibbutz sandal also became *de rigueur* for some folks who didn't live on kibbutzim—children in Jewish socialist youth groups, for example. The sandals became a core component of an aesthetic and "dress code" that advertised and endorsed a young person's intention to become a kibbutznik at maturity.

When the Rosenblith "shoemaking dynasty" fled Holland and founded Nimrod, Ltd. in Tel Aviv, the family noted that these kibbutz sandals could be given a new and different value. The kibbutzniks had a *need* for these sandals, the Rosenbliths observed, but Tel Avivniks could develop a *desire* for them. In the late 1950s, Nimrod started making horizontal-strapped "kibbutz"-wannabe sandals for Israeli urbanites, and even tourists.

The dominant ideology in Israel in this era belonged to the socialist pioneers and was accepted as superior by the majority that did not live off the land and were not even necessar-

ily socialist in political orientation. Nimrod's "kibbutz sandals" became an object of the admired "them"—the minority who led the "right" kind of life.

The aesthetic of the two brown straps began to signify the ethics of kibbutzniks—an idealized, romanticized "other." A simplicity was transferred from the field to the sidewalk and became a desired cosmopolitan object. The sandals allowed the Jewish wearer to remain in Tel Aviv (or in New York or L.A. or Miami Beach, or even Duluth, for that matter) and suddenly *look* or *feel* like a kibbutznik, signaling, via his or her feet, an affiliation with a deeply held value or with an aspiration or experience or loyalty, or even just with something that felt cool.

Once the Rosenbliths figured this out in the 1950s, it was pretty much a snap, when Bavta's 2000-year-old possessions became the stunning archeological find of the 1960s, for Nimrod, Ltd. to extend its understanding of "desire." Their new design—horizontal straps now sleeked into verticality—connected wearers not only in space, but in time as well: all the way to antiquity.

Even the name of their company—Nimrod—Tzafi told El Or, was chosen with an ear and eye to subliminal marketing. "In Holland there was a shoe company by the name of Robinson Crusoe," Tzafi said. "[My dad] searched for a parallel figure, a cultural hero of nature. He chose Nimrod, the biblical hunter." Bavta, Bar Kokhba, and Nimrod, then, had semiotic oomph, unearthing consumers' "desire."

Recently, El Or writes, she found herself craving "a pair of Nimrod sandals, an original pair from the classic era. On eBay, I find someone in New Jersey with a pair for $50. I buy it. I am now the owner of that thing, not the one I actually wanted, not the two vertical straps, another model, a man's style, which I never liked. *But I have it.*"

A "kibbutz-wannabe" sandal, from a Nimrod, Ltd., catalog of the 1950s. Whether worn in Tel Aviv or in Duluth, this sandal made a wearer *feel* like a kibbutznik. It signaled socialist values: utilitarianism, egalitarianism, physicality and simplicity.

She wonders: "What makes something a commodity, an item to be put on eBay almost 40 years after it was produced in a remote Middle Eastern country? Why did its owner think he could sell it or assume that someone would want it?" El Or notes that culture and politics "create the concept of the thing," but she accords primacy to "the desire to possess the thing"...the desire to *have* something, "that's what reigns uppermost," she says.

On the other hand, the scholar David Ohana, El Or writes, places the "utopia of Nimrod" as "central to the constitution of 'Hebraic authenticity'. He describes a cultural project of creating the first generation of natives in the land of Israel in the shape of a 'warrior and not of a scholar, to offer experience rather than knowledge, aesthetics instead of ethics, and myth rather than historical recognition'."

In Israel, El Or writes, "Some will go to great lengths to find these lost sandals that no one wants to produce anymore. Their desire will take them to *shanti* stores (what are called head shops in the United States) in Tel Aviv, where Indian clothes and footwear are sold along with leather sandals made in Hebron, Palestine."

More modern adaptations exist, of course. Young women "might trade the flat rough sole for the rubber one with good grip and buy sandals from the firm Source." Older women "might choose a comfort sole made by Naot, but all of them will look down at their feet and see two straps"... and a whole lot of foot.

Some will go to great lengths to find these lost sandals. They will haunt *shanti* stores ("head shops") in Tel Aviv where Indian clothes and footwear are sold... and, of course, they go on eBay.

The art historian and curator Gideon Ofrat disagrees with El Or's understanding of the continuity, authenticity, endurance and "emotional resistance to change" that inheres in these particular, foundational objects—both the Bavta Bat Simon sandal and the kibbutz one—and that continues to represent something perceived and experienced as "true."

"In 2007, huge ads were hung on bus stations promoting Nimrod shoes," Ofrat writes. "In the center stood a well-groomed Israeli youth, dressed in fashionable brands and wearing Nimrod shoes, of course. This spoiled, urban, up-to-date, well-off child of the 2000s is the great-grandchild of the mythical Nimrod." But between "today's consumer and this consumer's great-grandfather," Ofrat argues, "nothing in common remains."

El Or disagrees. Whether it's the eBay hunter, the *shanti* store haunter, or the Lilith reader who finds herself, as I did, mesmerized by Bavta's 2000-year-old sandal in the Israel Museum display case or even by the photos accompanying this story, the "young brand lover," says El Or, definitely has "something in common" with her mythical great-grandmother. ■

WEB EXCLUSIVE: Visit Lilith.org for Pnina Lahav's 1979 analysis of a different Zionist narrative. "Golda's Ambiguous Legacy" is online now.

I WAS REBORN

I did not appear
from sea-foam
like Venus.
I was born in a hot cauldron
in the pine woods
near Vilnius.

Lithuanian witches
had been mixing the potion
mix of sweat, blood, tubercular phlegm
from the lungs of young poets and artists,
coal dust from chimneys
in medieval cobblestoned streets,
pigeon feathers and cat fur.

Also, morning dew
from the fields of linen and buckwheat,
fragrant berries from wild raspberry bushes,
chanterelles and green velvet moss
warm from late summer sun
in Lithuanian forests.

Then I was murdered together
with grandmother Frieda and uncle Ruvim,
Frieda's one-hundred-and-two-year-old mother,
my mother's parents, Liba and Moshe,
her twenty-two-year-old baby brother Leibale—Leo
a blond boy with gentle green eyes,
her first love, the handsome socialist Arye,
six-year-old Sara,
shot in the arms of aunt Alta
who would not give her away,
Mother's twelve-year-old cousin
whose name I do not recall,
her picture with a rag doll
hanging in her right hand
I still have in a family album.

I was reborn
when my parents met in 1947;
my beautiful mother was looking
at a pinstripe gabardine jacket
in the window of a resale shop
on Komjaunimo.
She and Father first met during the war
some place between Kursk and Oriol
in the 16th Artillery division.
I was reborn
when they took a photo
with me at two weeks of age;
they were sitting on the grass
in the Zhalgirio Park,
Mother smiling in her white dress.
I was reborn
when she cooked and baked with her sisters
to celebrate Passover
when they sang "Katyusha"
and painted each other's nails red.

My father was wounded several times;
fragments of the bullets
remained in his back,
under the skin,
for the rest of his life
a reminder of five years in the front
where he knew
what he fought against
and did not always know
what for.
I was reborn
when my son turned seventeen
he tried on his grandfather's coat
the old tweed overcoat
fit him just so
his shoulders are the same width as my father's.

ANNA HALBERSTADT

© 2014 by the author. This poem was included in her collection of poems *Vilnius Diary*.

PROBABILITIES

a short story by
ELIZABETH EDELGLASS

Ryan proposed on Valentine's Day, 2009, arriving home with his lunch pail and one red rose, the twins jumping and giggling and clapping. Did the girls attach some significance to one red rose? Had he been watching reality TV with them on those nights when Jane was at the high school trying to teach color theory and abstract interpretation to folks who wouldn't paint a rose without first counting every petal? Even with Ryan's income from his plumbing business, his pickup truck now parked in her driveway, Jane couldn't quit working, at the very least to remind herself that he wasn't her husband, wasn't the girls' father, she was still responsible. But if his idea of watching them while she taught adult-ed evening classes was to turn on *The Bachelor* (or was it *The Bachelorette*?), then she might not, in fact, be very responsible in the choosing-a-new-father department.

Hadassah stage-whispered, "The box, where's the box?" And Esther actually reached her hands into Ryan's pants pockets from behind, while he stood at the kitchen sink scrubbing fingers black with grease from installing toilets all day at the new over-55 condos across town. Valentine's Day, 2009, was a Saturday, but plumbers work on Saturdays, and Jane had taken her girls to ballet that morning, not to Shabbat at shul. They were still in their tutus, pushing and shoving in an un-ballerina-like way for a turn at Ryan's pockets. So, they knew what was coming. He'd apparently brought them in on his plan. Sweet and simultaneously scary, as if they were ganging up on her.

The box proved to hold a ring from one of Ryan's Irish great-grandmothers, a speck of a diamond set in Art Deco filigree. The box itself looked as old as the ring, black velvet worn bare by generations of fingers opening and closing. Inside, Ryan showed her a matching wedding band, a thin circle scattered with tiny diamond chips. Jane's immigrant great-grandmothers hadn't owned diamonds, certainly no engagement rings, and only solid (although equally thin) gold wedding bands, like Jane's first wedding ring, the one Brian had bought her, as per Jewish law, no stones to interrupt the unbroken circle, meant to represent the unbroken course of a marriage.

That ring, Brian's solid wedding band, Jane had finally twisted off one day just this past fall, after Ryan had moved in, October, Yom Kippur actually, blaming swollen fingers from traditional Yom Kippur Indian summer heat. On that day, when she was supposed to have been fasting as the final step towards atonement before being sealed in the so-called Book of Life, she'd been in the kitchen, feeding the girls lunch (bagel with butter for Estee, with cream cheese for Das), unwrapping lox and smoked whitefish in preparation for the evening's traditional break-fast meal (which would have to wait until after sunset, when her mother would arrive from

Valentine's Day 2009, was a Saturday, but plumbers work on Saturdays, and Jane had taken her girls to ballet that morning, not to shul.

concluding services at synagogue). Ryan had made his own sandwich and eaten it somewhere out of sight, so as not to tempt her, muttering something about the temptations of Christ as he'd left the kitchen. To Ryan, all religion was malarkey.

Brian's ring must still be somewhere in this kitchen right now, as Ryan slipped his new/old engagement ring on Jane's finger. "Does it fit?" "I told you it'd fit." The girls clamored, with giggling and shushing and conspiratorial tugging at Ryan's shirtsleeves. There had apparently been secretive sizing of this ring via stealthy matching with one of Jane's old rings, maybe that very gold band from Brian, which she was sure still lay in the custard cup where she'd left it, in one of these kitchen cabinets, behind a closed door.

Jane had a steak marinating on the counter, instead of the mac-and-cheese or spaghetti that she and the girls had grown used to, before Ryan. It was, after all, Valentine's Day. But he said to put it back in the fridge for tomorrow. "No cooking for you tonight," he said, squeezing her hand with the ring that fit perfectly. "We could go out, but I thought pizza with the girls?" So the girls snacked on his organic blue corn chips that now lived in Jane's pantry, while he showered and headed back out into the bitter February night with damp hair (*risking pneumonia*, her mother would say) and a fresh shave, (an evening shave, don't think what her mother would say about that, the same thing Jane was thinking, anticipating).

He returned with a veggie pizza plus one small plain pizza (in case the girls weren't in the mood for vegetables) and one small white pizza (in case Estee wasn't in the mood for sauce). Also, balloons, which were pink, with Strawberry Shortcake and Happy Birthday!—not because the store was sold out of Valentine's Day balloons, but because the next day the girls would turn eight.

Brian and Jane had planned to ignore Valentine's Day, after the girls, not to detract from their February 15th birthday, although Brian had never trusted that was really their birthday. "How do we know for sure?" he'd said. "How do they know?" referring to the Korean orphanage and the mystery of the girls' birth halfway around the world. They were six months old when they'd arrived, or were they? "When my great-grandfather came from Russia," Brian had said, "he picked Christmas for his birthday. And his name was Jacob, not Jesus." Despite his doubts, Brian had insisted, "Let it be their day,

their week. We can celebrate Valentine's Day any time, maybe in August, like a half-birthday. Who's Saint Valentine to us, anyway?" By the following August, Jane had found herself preparing not for a summer Valentine's Day but for her first annual public kaddish in shul.

Ryan thought the same as Brian, but different (like their names), figuring out how to make Valentine's Day—and his proposal—about Jane, but *also* about the girls. "A birthday gift," he whispered in bed that night, reaching around, in the dark, to feel for the ring on her finger, "for all of us." Then he ran his hand up the length of her arm, her shoulder, the bumps of her spine. They'd learned how to make love, quietly, with Esther and Hadassah asleep across the hall.

"That's the same name, you know," Brian had said way back when those first photos had arrived from Korea, scrawny twins wrapped in one blanket, like a tiny two-headed Janus, God of beginnings. "Doesn't Hadassah mean Esther in Hebrew?"

"I know," Jane had said. "From the Hebrew for myrtle." She'd recited from the midrash in her baby name book. "Just as a myrtle has a sweet taste and a bitter smell, so too the biblical Esther was good and listened ('sweet') to the righteous Mordechai but was also strong and fierce ('bitter') against the evil Haman." The best of both worlds for those girls. And they'd needed it, the sweetness and the strength.

"You like him because of his name," her mother had said, only once, about Ryan, who carried a toolbox instead of a laptop. "It reminds you of Brian." Ryan had no idea that Hadassah meant Esther in Hebrew, and if he thought about the Ryan/Brian similarity, he was careful never to mention it.

The phone startled Jane at 6:30 the next morning. "You didn't know it would be me?" her mother said. "As if I wouldn't call on their birthday?" Jane's mother often called early on Sundays, her way of reminding, without saying, that Jane ought to enroll the girls in Sunday school.

"I didn't know anything, Mom," Jane said. "I was asleep." The girls came running in their pajamas, squealing "Grandma!" They knew who would call on their birthday morning. The ringing of the phone didn't frighten them.

"Do you love him?" her mother asked when she called back later that day.

"What is this, *Fiddler on the Roof*?" Jane replied.

"Can I help with dinner?" her mother changed the subject. She always came for the girls' birthday.

"Could you pick up the cake at Stop & Shop? I ordered it for after 3:00, so they'd be sure to bake it fresh today."

"I'm making babka," her mother said. "Chocolate, their favorite. Already on the second rise." Then, "Oh well, never mind. Two girls, two cakes. It'll be perfect." Jane's mother sometimes forgot to be careful with Jane, but then she remembered.

In the early years, before Ryan, maybe even before that first kaddish, her mother had held secret conversations with the rabbi, secret until she'd started dropping tidbits of his advice into otherwise casual conversations with Jane about the price of cornflakes or weren't the girls old enough for potty training. To remarry ("Someday," her mother had always stressed, "I'm only imagining, it never hurts to think ahead."), she would need a *beit din*, a Jewish court, to certify that her husband was no longer alive. This was a problem for the 9/11 widows. The *beit din* could not rely on probabilities. Lacking a body, a "corporeal body" (Had the rabbi really said those words? Had her mother really repeated them to Jane?), the judges would need witnesses, evidence, proof beyond supposition that Brian was dead.

He had, after all, escaped once. Of that, Jane had evidence, one phone call, Brian's *I'm okay* phone call, his *I'm okay* recorded inside a machine that she would never throw out, although the technology to replay it would surely someday be as extinct as Brian. And what of the second phone call, Brian's *I'm going back up* call, the call she had answered, the call she'd waited frantically by the phone to be sure not to miss? Of that Jane had no corroborating evidence.

Why would she bother with a beit din*? Jewish law hadn't exactly kept its promises to her in the past.*

Maybe those rabbis, surely all men, would think she should have let the machine pick up that second call, too, should have heard Brian's final words only through the distance of magnetic tape, just so that *now* she'd have *proof*. But proof of what? Proof he'd started back up, proof he'd *said* he was starting back up, still not enough to prove he had actually died, been disintegrated, disappeared into what most people referred to as *thin air*, a sickeningly wrong cliché.

As if Jane hadn't wished, night after night after sleepless night, that the opposite could somehow be proven true. That he hadn't gone back up. That he was lying unconscious or amnesiac in a hospital somewhere, would one day awaken like Sleeping Beauty and walk back through her door. Or maybe he'd had second thoughts about parenthood, even about marriage, had grabbed his chance, fled to South America, anywhere, somewhere alive. She'd forced herself to figure out this new Facebook, had posted pictures of the girls—maybe he'd see what he was missing and come home—until her mother pointed out the risk of exposing her girls to the public. "They're rich girls now," her mother had said, "or at least that's what people think. And there are a lot of crazies

out there." Jane could never imagine suddenly reversing course, concentrating all her energy on wishing to prove Brian dead.

Of course, all this was only relevant if she were to remarry a Jew. Even then, would she bother with a *beit din*? Jewish law hadn't exactly kept its promises to her in the past.

After carrying in both cakes from the car in winter's dark that made late afternoon feel like midnight, before even kissing the girls and giving them their presents, Jane's mother pulled off her gloves, took Jane's warm hand in her two cold ones, to admire the ring. "It's lovely," she said. "Just let me get my glasses. Where did I put my purse?"

"It's still on your shoulder, Mom," Jane said, reclaiming her hand. "I've gotta put on my boots." She'd shoveled a path to the patio grill, for the steak, which would suffice for the three adults, since the girls wanted their favorite spaghetti (plain for Estee, with Ragu for Das). Jane never broiled in her kitchen, not even in February, not even with the exhaust fan on for the smoke.

"You should only be happy," her mother soothed.

The girls ate in the Disney princess dresses her mother had brought for their birthday. Then they blew out candles on both cakes. "I thought for Purim," her mother said. "The dresses. They could both be Queen Esther."

"Hadassah's working on her own costume," Jane said, "binoculars out of toilet paper tubes. I think she's going as a bird watcher." Jane had never admitted to Brian that she'd picked the names Esther/Hadassah at least in part because of her memories of dressing up as Queen Esther on Purim. Her mother had once found an old wedding dress at a thrift shop, and, with tucking and hemming, that dress had lasted through years of Sunday-school Purim parades. One year, Jane had been allowed to add one of her mother's old pillbox hats, once her pearls.

After dinner, while her mother tried to wash off green, possibly dangerous supermarket frosting from the girls' fingers, and lips and tongues, Jane and Ryan brought out their gifts—art supplies, grown-up art supplies, selected by Jane with care, paints and oil pastels and watercolor pencils, all organized in fishing-tackle boxes, just like hers. Her fishing-tackle box had been Ryan's suggestion, one day after he'd first moved in, when he'd been moving around her art stuff in the basement, looking for a place for his tools and table saw.

"Let's paint," they insisted. "Now."

"Just one," Jane said. "In the basement, then bed. There are new easels, wait 'til you see. Kiss Grandma goodbye first."

"I'll help with the dishes," her mother said, carrying plates to the sink. "Tell me about those condos of yours, Ryan. Should I sell the house and buy one?" At least she didn't call him Brian.

Esther, who refused to take off her new Cinderella dress, but also didn't want to get it dirty, drew a flower garden with watercolor pencils, to be brushed over with water tomorrow. And Hadassah, back in jeans and a polo, sleeves pushed up to reveal golden brown arms even in February, painted a family: a mother, a father, and two children, both girls. Without help from Jane, she rummaged through her box and found the tube of raw sienna Jane had bought—not perfect, but better than any kids-paint-set color for painting the girls' faces and also their hands sticking out from their princess dresses.

After Jane's mother finally went home, while Ryan emptied the dishwasher, Jane tucked the girls into bed, too late for a bath, Estee's hands still green from frosting, Das's streaked with every color of paint, what would the teacher say tomorrow? Later, in her own bed with Ryan, after one more midnight tuck-in and whispered happy birthday, she lay awake wondering where their mother was tonight, their other mother, wishing she was the one who could remember the day of their birth.

"We'll go shopping on Saturday," Ryan interrupted, his arms encircling her.

"Huh?"

"For a solid gold band, for the wedding."

"When did she get to you?"

"Who?"

"My mother." Jane rolled over to face him in the dark. "When did she talk to you? I should've known why she stayed to help with the dishes."

"Don't," he said, putting one finger to her lips. The backs of his hands were smooth and hairless from all the time they spent in water, but his fingertips were callused. He wouldn't be wearing a wedding ring, as Brian had, too dangerous in his line of work—he'd once known a man who'd somehow snagged his wedding ring on a power snake and nearly lost a finger.

"Rabbis and their rules," Jane said. "If I don't care, why should you?"

"It's a nice idea," he said, "the circle of life."

"First *Fiddler on the Roof*, now a Disney movie?"

"Huh? I'm serious," he said, tightening the circle of his arms around her body. "Forever."

Ryan wasn't her mother, and he wasn't Brian. He was himself. He rotated her tires and cleaned her gutters and taught her girls to flip pancakes. He'd built the girls' new easels from scratch, in her basement, *their* basement—professional-looking A-frame wooden easels measured to just the right height for eight-year-olds. And in bed, after making love, he hummed, sometimes "Total Eclipse of the Heart," as if he'd known Jane since she was twelve. He would be as foreign to those *beit din* judges, in their long beards and side curls, as they were to Jane. But he wasn't foreign to Jane, not anymore.

"Okay," she said, recognizing the contours of his face in the shadows, "but your ring, too." She would wear his great-grandmother's wedding band, with its diamonds so tiny maybe her mother wouldn't notice. But if a solid gold band, for the ceremony, might give them a chance at forever, who was she to say no? ■

Elizabeth Edelglass's story "Variables" won the 2005 Lilith Short Story Contest. Her stories have appeared in Michigan Quarterly Review *(winner of the Lawrence Foundation Prize),* In The Grove *(William Saroyan Centennial Prize winner),* American Literary Review, The Ilanot Review *and more. She is currently at work on a story collection and two novels.*

REVIEWS

The Persian Problem

by Danielle Berrin

It has been more than three decades since the fall of the Shah, when tens of thousands of Iranian Jews fled their ancestral home for the freedom of the American West. Visit any sidewalk café on the streets of Beverly Hills and it is plain to see that this immigrant community has done well recreating their lives and their lot. But what happens when a community so deeply identified with a cultural past must reconcile itself to a strange, new future?

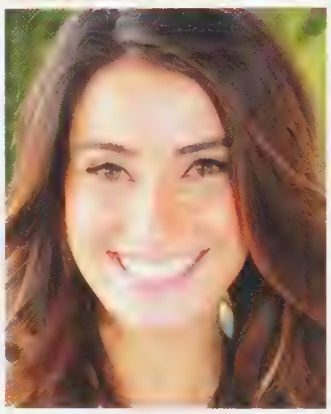
Two words: identity crisis.

Who are Iranian Jews, *really*? Are they quintessentially Iranian, with their teeming families, ritual quiddities and 3,000-year history? Are they *Persian*, their preferred title, since it denotes a rich cultural heritage and not the Iran of today, which is thoroughly Islamic and avowedly anti-Zionist? Are they—slowly, painfully, deliberately—becoming *American*? Or, is the community some hybrid-form of ancient/modern, eastern/western that doesn't quite know what to call itself?

These are the questions with which the community is wrestling within and without, as a generation that never knew Iran and came of age in Beverly Hills tries to forge its own future. The conflicting strains of identity that comprise L.A.'s Persian Jewish community also provide ample fodder for the emerging Iranian-American literature of Los Angeles, a field dominated by women, whose voices have been given full volume in the new American world.

As **Gina B. Nahai** puts it in her soaring new work, ***The Luminous Heart of Jonah S.***, (Akashic, $17) "[W]riting seemed to be the weapon of choice for every bored Iranian housewife in New York and Los Angeles, it was not the kind of work self-respecting men willingly engaged in."

Despite the long tradition of Persian literature and poetry, modern Persians see writing as more of a trivial pursuit, far less lucrative than business or medicine, and therefore, easily relegated to the province of women—who have wisely seized upon it. The sharp-tongued Nahai, author of five novels, is the most prolific so far, closely followed by **Dora Levy-Mossanen**, who published her fourth book, ***Scent of Butterflies*** (Sourcebooks, $15) in 2014. **Saba Soomekh** is the scholar among them, a lecturer on religious studies and a graduate of Harvard Divinity School; her non-fiction book, ***From the Shahs to Los Angeles: Three Generations of Iranian Jewish Women Between Religion and Culture***, (SUNY Press, $75) serves as an astute anthropological study.



From top: Gina Nahai and Saba Soomekh

Collectively, these women's voices, their memories and their meanings, have come to define the L.A. Persian community and its problems. In mid-February, Nahai and Soomekh joined each other at Sinai Temple in Los Angeles for a dishy discussion that zeroed in on the community's hot-button issues—among them, assimilation, an obsession with wealth and advantageous marriage, sexist sexual mores and a bitter sibling rivalry with their Ashkenazi neighbors.

"The question is," Nahai wondered, "what do we do now that we're here? Is it better to assimilate and become American or cling to at least some of the things we lost?"

The tension of tangled but proud identities is vivid in the new literature. In *Scent of Butterflies*, Levy-Mossanen's heroine, Soraya, immediately announces herself as binary: "I am a rich woman from a backwards country…a Jewish woman from Iran." We quickly learn that Soraya's husband has betrayed her with her childhood best friend. Rather than endure the humiliation of staying in her marriage, Soraya absconds to Los Angeles, which she views not as a paradise of palm trees, but a place of exile. In her eyes, L.A. is far less sensuous than Iran, with "terrain as flat and foreign as a stranger's palm."

Angry and embittered, Soraya attempts to rebuild her life—in Bel Air, of course—by reclaiming the hobbies she left behind. As memories both beautiful and bitter wash over her, Soraya bides her time gardening, harvesting butterflies and taking photographs, finding comfort in the Persian belief in magic (sometimes practicing voo-doo-like destruction on pictures of those who betrayed her). Her personal exile mirrors the more familiar political one. With the help of curses, odd cures, superstitions, signs from the dead and the dark power of the evil eye, Soraya clings to the magical belief that as exile and ex-wife "the victim always ends up triumphant."

Nahai's book, by contrast, opens with the main character, dead. In a sweeping epic of melodrama and magical realism, Nahai gives us one family's story, span-

TOP PHOTO: ANGELA NAHAI, BOTTOM PHOTO: BRANDON WISE.

ning two continents and three generations. It is a portrait of a community in full, and how all the interlocking figures that make up today's Persian village-within-a-city somehow fall short of their deepest aspirations—that is, to return to a time gone by, a place no longer theirs.

Nahai holds nothing back in her trenchant assessment of the ensuing "American" (read: Ashkenazi) response to these immigrant intruders. When learning of the death of one extravagant Iranian: "The Americans who called wished to express… their abiding resentment of the entire [Iranian] community for being bold enough to live in the most desirable neighborhoods of Los Angeles, send their children to the most competitive schools, and excel in the most difficult and lucrative professions while, at the same time, keeping mostly to themselves and each other, speaking Persian everywhere they went, and insisting that their children marry other Iranians. It was simply too cheeky, too unimmigrant-like, for these Eye-ray-nians to be living next door to and eating in the same establishments as the icons and avatars of American culture."

Nahai's blistering criticisms of Persian envy and resentment are evident on many pages. But she also turns her gaze backward—on history—and inward, onto the community itself, telling a story of immigrant isolation and alienation even through survival and triumph.

Here is a community blessed and cursed, that feels itself strongly superior to its neighbors and yet equally insecure, that is intimate and insular, and yet, even among kin, deeply discriminating. It is what cultural anthropologists might refer to as a "shame culture," in which the means of preserving the social order is inculcated through shame and the threat of ostracism. In other words, conform to communal values and you will be loved; break with tradition and face the dangers of the evil eye.

Shame can be strong, but in a country where the lure of individualism is so deeply ingrained, even the most powerful cultural patterns begin to give way. How, then, does a young Persian Jew maintain their distinctiveness without becoming—God forbid —a bland American?

"For a 25-year old, the challenge is trying to form a hybrid identity," Soomekh said, during the discussion at Sinai Temple. "How do they form themselves within a community that is so insular, where there is love and support, but also 100 people telling you what to do? I don't think the word *boundary* exists in the Farsi language."

"I think younger people feel they have to choose," Nahai said, "between being embraced by the community and their own independence."

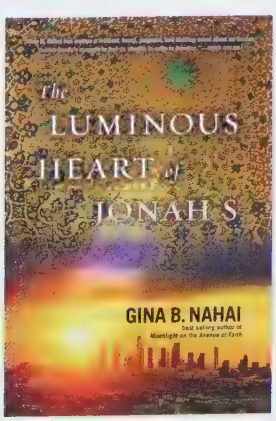
Despite the long tradition of Persian literature and poetry, modern Persians see writing as a trivial pursuit, easily relegated to the province of women.

Both women agreed that change begins in the family—and that many of the most powerful cultural values are transmitted through mothers, who set the social calendar and determine what ways of life are acceptable for their children. It is the women who raise boys who are permitted to do "whatever they want," Soomekh said, and at the same time, insist that their daughters remain *najeeb*—"pure and virginal."

Indeed, it is also the women characters in their novels that steer the course of action, who are the risk-takers, sorcerers, soothsayers, soul-changers and survivors.

"Women [in the Persian community] need to develop their minds and start thinking outside the box," Nahai said. "And re-evaluate their values, and not raise children that will speak with a Persian accent and get married at 27, and not think wealth is the only calling card.

"Home has a lot to do with that," she concluded. "Men leave [to go to work]; that's up to the women."



DANIELLE BERRIN *is an award-winning columnist for the Los Angeles Jewish Journal. She writes the Hollywood Jew blog for jewishjournal.com.*

"Salon Jewesses." Just How Acceptable Were These "Fair Hebrews"?

by Emily J. Levine

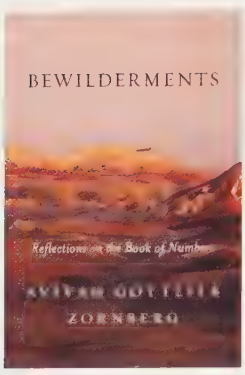
The *salonnières*, those upper-class women who hosted salons for philosophers and poets in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Europe, offer fertile ground for probing women's history. Equal parts moderator, mediator, and hostess-with-the-mostest, these women cultivated the essential Enlightenment-era art of sociability. Of course there were limits to their ability to please their contemporaries: The French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau complained to D'Alembert, "In society they do not know anything although they judge everything."

The rise of the *salonnières* coincided with the period of Jewish emancipation between 1789 and 1815, during which Central European Jews gained incremental civil rights. As a result, a relatively high proportion of Jewish women—Henriette Hertz, Rahel Levin-Varnhagen, and Dorothea Mendelssohn among them—were poised to play this role.

But any nostalgia for this period is tempered by the cautionary tale presented by **Hilde Spiel** in ***Fanny von Arnstein: Daughter of the Enlightenment***, a biography first published in 1962 now republished in a new translation (New Vessel Press, $19). Born in Berlin in 1758, Fanny von Arnstein was largely responsible for exporting the salon concept to Vienna. Daughter of a financier to King Frederick II of Prussia and wife of a Viennese banker, von Arnstein used her musical talent (Mozart frequented her salon) and education (she was tutored on Moses Mendelssohn) to cultivate a hospitable, cultured, and social environment in her home.

Unfortunately von Arnstein left behind no published works, which presents a challenge for historians, as Michael Z. Wise observes in his excellent introduction. This absence of source material is felt throughout the book. Fanny von Arnstein was a gifted musician, spoke several languages, and socialized with royalty, diplomats, and literati, but wrote only

AVIVAH ZORNBERG EXPLAINS



CELEBRATED EVERYWHERE for her brilliant teaching and her dazzling skill in interpreting Bible narratives, **Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg** offers masterful midrashic readings of biblical texts. Through psychological insight, Jewish philosophy and comparative literary analysis, she plumbs the depths of rabbinic interpretation. Those who've had the complex pleasure of reading her previous works—*The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis*; *The Particulars of Rapture: Reflections on Exodus* and *The Murmuring Deep: Reflections on the Biblical Unconscious*—will be delighted to know that ***Bewilderments: Reflections on the Book of Numbers*** is just out from Knopf Doubleday ($28.95). But even new readers will savor this commentary, accompanied by the biblical text.

Zornberg's analysis of the book of the Bible known in Hebrew as "BaMidbar" ("in the wilderness") weaves together seemingly opposing themes. One is the tragedy that those in the generation who leave Egypt will never enter the Promised Land; instead they wander, homeless and skeptical, in a wilderness both physical and a spiritual. The second theme arises from Hasidic insight, seeing the wilderness wandering as a period of spiritual yearning, and of a people's intensive engagement with God. The combination resonates profoundly with the human condition at the same time that it probes the idea of an imperfect people nevertheless chosen by God.

Curious about her approach, **Rabbi Chana Thompson Shor** spoke to Dr. Zornberg via email.

What most surprised you while you were exploring BaMidbar in preparation for writing *Bewilderments*?
Interesting question! The surprise lay in the stark temporal structure of the book, with the 40-year gulf of dying somehow camouflaged, short-circuited, so that the generations replace each other without remark. The tragedy of mortality and particularly the tragedy of the failure of the Exodus project, at least for its protagonists, made me think again about the ongoing skepticism of the people's voice.

Do you think the book of BaMidbar is essentially tragic, because those who leave at the Exodus never "arrive"? Or does Israel's evolution in the wilderness fundamentally redeem the tragedy?
I veer away from "fundamental redemptions." I think there is a certain change between the generations, but at the same time, "*Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose*!" I think that redemption

happens in listening to oneself. That is the power of the many things said, in anger and despair and resentment, throughout the wilderness. Something accumulates as the generations listen to themselves and then read themselves. It is an ongoing process of refining interpretation. Which does not dispose of the tragic dimension of the narrative.

Among the many things said "in anger and despair and resentment" as you put it, we would have to include the people's complaints about the lack of water, their desire for meat and their accusation that Moses had brought them out to the wilderness to die (which they might as well have done in Egypt). What is so bad about the sin of the Spies who report back on the Promised Land unfavorably—given that we can sympathize with this fear and uncertainty? The Spies report that the current inhabitants of the Promised Land would be a formidable adversary. Given that what they say is essentially accurate, why does this earn the people such a harsh reaction from God?
I see the "sin" as lack of trust, rather than simply fear. This makes love of God, or of the Land, or even of oneself impossible. A deep destructiveness works within human beings, which is self-destructiveness as much as anything else. Human aggression turned against the good should at least be recognized as such.

AVIVAH GOTTLIEB ZORNBERG PHOTO: DEBBI COOPER

It could be that my interest in relationality, or in the emotional, embodied experience of the text, speaks to women particularly. However, I am not sure of that.

This, I think, is what Caleb and Joshua are saying. Destructive impulses cannot be totally disposed of but may be integrated to allow love to flourish. This is how the Rabbis read *Ve-ahavta…. be-chol levavecha*—"With both your hearts, the good inclination and the bad one."

Is your approach to the text "Orthodox"?
I would hope that it would speak to readers regardless of denomination. It is informed by a sense of the sacredness of the texts, rabbinic as well as biblical, and the sacredness of the human quest for meaning.

You live in Israel now, that Promised Land, though you were raised and educated in the U.K. What led to your decision to make aliyah?
I had always hoped to come to live in Israel. Growing up in Scotland, fairly isolated from communal Jewish life and immersed in Jewish texts and a tragic awareness of Jewish history, I felt it evident that the extraordinary gift of Israel should be taken up with gratitude.

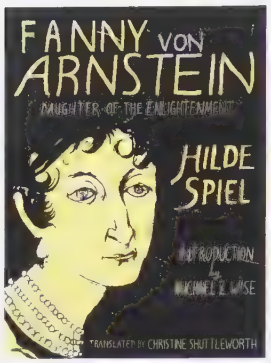
How is your work viewed in Israel? Is it affected by the demographic rise in the ultra-Orthodox?
I have always enjoyed my encounter with students of many kinds here in Israel. The demographic growth of the ultra-Orthodox does not trouble me, nor do I think it limits the size of my audience. Times and fashions in Torah study do change, but there is a vital and growing audience, especially among women, for vigorous and creative Torah study.

Why do you think your work resonates particularly with women?
I hesitate to generalize. I have had many engaged and responsive male students. In terms of numbers, more women do seem to be drawn to my classes. Perhaps I seem less threatening because of my "feminine" manner. Or it could be that my interest in relationality, or in the emotional, embodied experience of the text, speaks to women particularly. However, I am not sure about that. And in writing, these suggestions do not seem so relevant.

Is your work itself feminist?
I have a strong interest in the inner and outer lives of women, in their autonomy and expressiveness. I feel the struggles of women as my own. This surely finds voice in my writing and, even more, in my teaching. I would say that my work is informed by, among other things, a feminist sensibility. I am also happy to add that my husband, Eric, fully shares the responsibility of running our household. This has been invaluable in giving me space for my work.

a scant few letters. So how can a biographer measure the impact of her achievements?

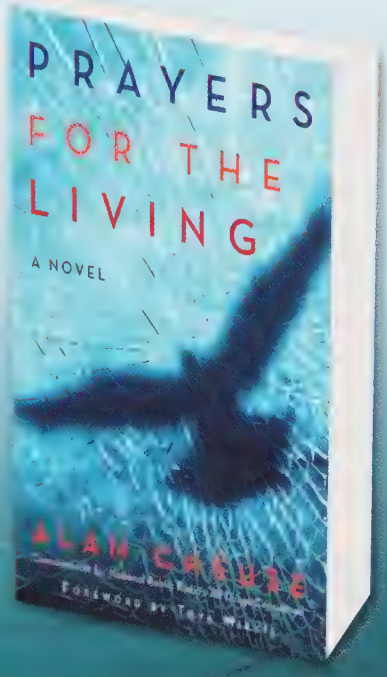
Spiel relies heavily on the portraits of others, including that of Joseph von Sonnenfels, whom Spiel calls the "Moses Mendelssohn of Vienna," and those of the diplomat Karl August Varnhagen von Ense, whose admiration of von Arnstein is evident in his frequent descriptions of her as "a tall, slim figure, radiant with beauty and grace." Not all were so admiring. An advisor to the Austrian diplomat Metternich, Friedrich Gentz, who was known to call Rahel Varnhagen "little Levy" behind her back, was just as spiteful towards the Arnsteins. That Fanny von Arnstein can be grasped only through the gaze of others—as the striking cover art by Liana Finck conveys—underscores the fear of women's historians that the *salonnières* may not have been intellectual principals but rather docile agents who enabled conversations in which they played no substantive part.



Gentz's double talk raises the book's other central question: just how much was this "fair Hebrew" accepted? Von Arnstein benefited from the reign of Joseph II, the liberal Austrian ruler who abolished serfdom and brought new optimism to the land. In the weeks before he passed his famous Edict of Tolerance of 1782 that would grant limited rights to the Jews, von Arnstein was rumored to have appeared before the Emperor "like Esther before Ahasuerus."

But the Napoleonic Wars of 1805–1815 changed the circumstances for Jews who relied on their embodiment of French culture to permit their acceptance in Central European society. Napoleon's invasion stirred nationalism in the German lands. To prove their loyalty, the von Arnsteins assisted wounded Austrian soldiers and financed the anti-French uprising in Tyrol. When the Congress of Vienna concluded and the boundaries of Europe were redrawn, Fanny von Arnstein retreated to Baden in failing health. Sadly, at the last minute, the Congress denied Central European Jews full emancipation.

Fanny von Arnstein was caught in the double bind of being Jewish and being female. Arnstein's solution to her dilemma—what Spiel calls "The Third Solution" moving "half in the Jewish



PRAYERS FOR THE LIVING

A NOVEL by ALAN CHEUSE

Book reviewer for NPR's *All Things Considered*

Foreword by Tova Mirvis, Author of *The Ladies Auxiliary*

"*Prayers for the Living* offers a vision of harsh beauty and for its wrenching honesty, for its simultaneous intimacy and wide scope, for the power of its soaring language. It deserves to live among the great novels of Jewish American experience. It is a book that bears the weight of something old, yet feels new and utterly alive at the same time." —Tova Mirvis

"Cheuse's complex approach to storytelling via conversations, letters, and prayers is so much bigger than a typical narrative, as is this provocative story." —Booklist Online

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and half in the Christian world"—was really no solution at all. As Spiel admits, it "would have been so perfect that it could not be carried out: like every other idea since the beginning of time."

The shadow of the postwar period in which Austrian novelist Spiel wrote those words looms over her entire work. When her translator (who is her daughter), Christine Shuttleworth, describes the Jews from the Dutchy of Austria as being "deported" to Poland in the fifteenth century, one wonders if this is an anachronistic translation or portends the ominous turn history would take. Writing from Vienna where she returned after the war, Spiel repeatedly suggests that her von Arnstein biography presents a "parable." Was the Esther of Vienna the maker of her own fate? As a woman? As a Jew? This rich tale leaves the reader to contend with the many dilemmas of her life, and their meaning for our own time.

Fanny von Arnstein was caught in the double bind of being Jewish and being female in 19th-century Vienna.

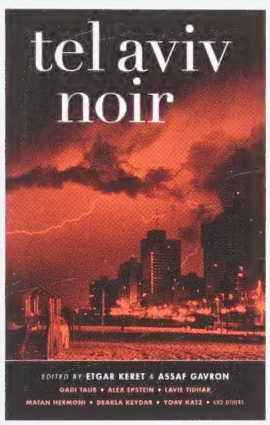
EMILY J. LEVINE *is the author of* Dreamland of Humanists: Warburg, Cassirer, Panofsky, and the Hamburg School, *just out in paperback from the University of Chicago Press.*

Dislocated Characters in Tel Aviv Fiction

by Yona Zeldis McDonough

With its breezy reputation as a fun-in-the-sun destination for pleasure-seeking Israelis and tourists alike, Tel Aviv doesn't seem to have a dark side. But in two new collections of short stories, the shiny surface is scratched to reveal something murkier below.

The spiky and deliberately off-kilter collection by **Shelly Oria**, *New York 1, Tel Aviv 0* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $14), is filled with characters, mostly young or in early middle age, who pivot back and forth between the United States and Israel; for these searching souls, there is nothing stationary in their lives, nothing solid or grounded or permanent. Instead, everything seems provisional, constructed from scratch without a blueprint. Gender and sexual orientation shift; national identity is called into question.


tel aviv
noir
EDITED BY ETGAR KERET & ASSAF GAVRON
GADI TAUB • ALEX EPSTEIN • LAVIE TIDHAR
MATAN HEEMONI • DEAKLA KEYDAR • YOAV KATZ • AND OTHERS

In the title story, the Israeli-born and -raised narrator has been romantically involved with women but finds herself in an affair with another expat Israeli, a guy named Ron. Ron is also involved with Zoe, and the three form a self-styled ménage à trois in which the alliances keep changing. The narrator asks herself: "Who is this person? That me who isn't Israeli and isn't American, isn't gay and isn't straight—who is she?" The story's affecting ending brings her no closer to an answer. Oria often plays fast and loose with form, abandoning conventional narratives for the list of kisses recounted in "Documentation" or the spare, verse-like snippets that chart the marriage in "My Wife in Converse." She may well be the voice of a generation that has banished certainty and predictability to the realm of the rotary dial and instead accepted a new, uneasy truth: all is in flux.

Tel Aviv Noir, an anthology edited by **Etgar Keret** and **Assaf Gavron** (Akashic Books, $15.95), shrinks the focus even tighter: distinct Tel Aviv neighborhoods that lay bare their gritty, less-than-lovely aspects. In the very first sentences, the two 22-year olds at the center of Julia Fermentto's "Who's A Good Boy?" take off their shoes and dip their feet in the fountain on Rothschild Boulevard. They also shoplift, smoke, flirt with the guys who hit on them and in one case, get slapped. They are bored, they are confused, they are filled with a hazy desire for something that continues to elude them. In "Slow Cooking," by Deakla Keydar, the narrator invents an elaborate fantasy about one of the customers who frequents the supermarket where she works. In her mind, the man, a doctor, is separating from his wife and newly single. She too is separated from her husband, and can project all her longing—for connection, for meaning—onto him, only to be disappointed when the fantasy unravels. But an encounter with an African refugee she meets in Levinsky Park offers her an unexpected moment of grace. "All at once, all eyes left me and focused on the food. Mouths began chewing, the room was filled with the pleasant sounds of forks against plates and spoons against bowls. Good food sounds. My food. Nothing could ruin their appetite for it." And in this humble moment, even the seamiest side of Tel Aviv is briefly redeemed.

YONA ZELDIS MCDONOUGH's *sixth novel,* You Were Meant for Me, *was published by New American Library in 2014. She is Lilith's fiction editor.*

FOR AUTHOR INTERVIEWS, visit Lilith.org/blog and book news of interest to Lilith readers.

Amy Winehouse: A Family Portrait

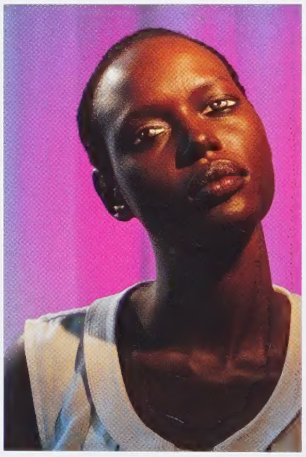
English singer and songwriter Amy Winehouse (1983–2011) is known for her deep vocals and her eclectic mix of musical genres, including soul, rhythm and blues, jazz and reggae. Before her death from a drug overdose, she'd achieved worldwide critical acclaim for her albums and live performances. An exhibition that includes the singer's guitar, record collection and iconic outfits was curated by the Jewish Museum London with help from her brother, Alex Winehouse, who says, "Amy was someone who was incredibly proud of her Jewish-London roots. We weren't religious, but we were traditional. I hope that the world gets to see this other side not just of Amy, but of our typical Jewish family." A related exhibit presents the story of the great Jewish migration to London from Russia and Eastern Europe in the late 19th century, which included the Winehouse family. Through May 1 at Beit Hatfutsot, the Museum of the Jewish People in Tel Aviv. *bh.org.il*

Flory Jagoda Sings

Born in Sarajevo to a musical family whose roots stretch back to Spain prior to 1492—and who then lived in small Jewish communities in Bosnia and Croatia over the centuries—Flory Jagoda is one of the few members of her family to survive the Holocaust. Her career has been preserving and sharing her family's traditional songs and lyrics—composing, recording and performing worldwide that musical culture. A one-hour documentary, "Flory's Flame," weaves her life story together with the 2013 Library of Congress concert celebrating her becoming a National Heritage Fellow, the highest honor given by the U.S. to traditional artists. *florysflamemovie.com*

Cancer Survivors Need a Holiday

Refanah is an Israeli nonprofit organization that provides a free donated holiday for cancer survivors and those living with cancer, together with supporting family or friends, so that they can take time out from this disease and rejuvenate physically and mentally. People in Israel who own "holiday units"—like timeshares—can donate this resource that they do not always fully utilize for the benefit of people touched by cancer. The donors benefit too, says founder Robyn Schames; they get to experience "community giving and social responsibility." Eligibility details at *refanah.org*.



Women Dressed as Dolls

In the "Doll Girls" subculture, women alter themselves to look like Barbie, baby dolls, and Japanese anime characters through makeup, dress, and even cosmetic surgery. New photographs by artist Laurie Simmons go beyond the disturbing questions raised by the "Doll Girls" community to explore notions of beauty, identity, and persona. The exhibition, "How We See," is at the Jewish Museum in Manhattan through August 9, 2015. *thejm.org*

After the Army...

After their military service, tens of thousands of Israeli 20-somethings opt to trek the wildest, most inhospitable places in the world. These trips are a rite of passage after they have experienced war, terrorism, and the rigors of the army—a break between uniform and adult life, including college and careers. A new organization, Fighters for Life, aims to combine altruism with this tradition of post-army travel, arranging for these young but mature Israelis to offer English and hygiene instruction, make art, renovate orphanages and more. Teams are planned now for Bombay for September 2015, and Buenos Aires for December 2015. By contributing their energy and skills to emergency or humanitarian efforts around the world, they're also hoping for good PR for Israel. *ffl.org.il*

Fertility Help

Trying to have a baby? Hasida is a nonprofit Jewish fertility support organization, created to raise awareness of infertility in the Jewish community and to reduce financial barriers to treatment. Founded by Rabbi Idit Solomon and her husband, Steven, and based in Berkeley, California, Hasidah is the Hebrew word for stork. It also has the same linguistic root, HSD, as *hesed*, loving-kindness. Solomon says the organization's core is the belief that "one of the greatest gifts of loving-kindness is helping people struggling with infertility to become parents." *Hasidah.org, Idit@hasidah.org*

Mobility in Israel

Tourists with mobility problems who have difficulty getting around in Israel now have help. Yad Sarah lends medical/rehab equipment free (for a refundable deposit) and will even deliver it to your hotel or apartment. It is the largest voluntary organization in Israel, and provides free or nominal-cost services designed to make life easier for sick, disabled or elderly people and their families in Israel—and this includes tourists. For a modest fee, wheelchair-locking vans can take you everywhere. The organization also recommends guides who specialize in guiding tourists with limited mobility and special needs and are experts in the accessibility of sites and hotels. Tourism@yadsarah.org.il 972-2-644-4618

AMY WINEHOUSE: COURTESY OF BEIT HATFUTSOT.
LAURIE SIMMONS, HOW WE SEE / AJAK (VIOLET), 2015, PIGMENT PRINT, © LAURIE SIMMONS, COURTESY THE ARTIST AND SALON 94.

Literature of Storms

Imagine footage of Hurricane Sandy projected onto original 1920s interior design magazine pages. By superimposing references to a North American storm over symbols of European modernist ideals—associated with the development of the young State of Israel—Israeli artist Dana Levy grapples with the environmental and political aftermath of local and global "progress." The 2014 video installation is entitled "Literature of Storms." In another large video-art piece, Levy samples sounds of recent oil drilling technologies over phosphoric close-ups of shrubbery in the endangered Everglades National Park in Florida. Her work in video, video installation, and photography explores memory, identity, and nature. One of 6 Artists/6 Projects, this exhibit is part of the 50th anniversary celebration of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, through August 29, 2015. *Israelmuseum.org.il*

Nicole Eisenman's Seder

Director Claudia Gould of New York's Jewish Museum has been inviting artists to explore the museum's vast holdings that are not often on display, creating exhibitions from what has caught their attention. The latest installment of the museum's Masterpieces & Curiosities exhibition series, Nicole Eisenman's painting "Seder" (2010), is presented along with portraits and objects from the institution's vaults. Eisenman infuses her work with dark humor, contemporary fears and desires, and sly critiques of pop culture and art history. The viewer is the seder leader, with attendees both bored and enthusiastic at this meal, reminiscent of luncheons and dinners painted by Renoir, Bonnard and Rockwell. Through August 9, 2015. *thejewishmuseum.org/exhibitions/masterpieces-curiosities-nicole-eisenmans*

Humble Jewish Tailors to Top Fashion Designers

"Dream Weavers" is a group exhibition featuring dresses, jewelry and accessories from an international dream-team of 20 Jewish fashion designers, including Donna Karan, Sonia Rykiel, Diane von Furstenberg, Nicole Farhi, Ilana Goor, Sarah Moon, Natalie Capell and Inbar Spector. Items represent some of the fashion world's greatest success stories along with the trajectories of traditional Jewish tailors as they immigrated to New York to become workers in early-20th-century sweatshops, founded large clothing companies like Levi Strauss, and went on to establish international fashion empires. Through May 17 at Beit Hatfutsot in Tel Aviv. *bh.org.il*

The Writing Shelter

On Monday nights in St. Louis, women of all backgrounds congregate at the Women's Safe House, a shelter for victims of domestic violence, where student volunteers from Washington University and shelter residents write in journals, share life stories and discuss poetry and prose. Louise Kornblatt, an undergraduate when she founded the ongoing program at the shelter, says, "The program provides a safe space where women can develop their own voices, and it offers transformation for women who have suppressed their narratives of abuse in order to survive." Each session includes an examination of a text and a writing activity. Mentors are active writers and trained in the sensitive topic of domestic violence. *twsh.org, www.facebook.com/washuwritingshelter*

—compiled by Naomi Danis

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FROM TOP: DANA LEVY, LITERATURE OF STORMS, 2014, THREE CHANNEL VIDEO INSTALLATION, COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST AND BRAVERMAN GALLERY, TEL AVIV; NICOLE EISENMAN, SEDER, 2010, OIL ON CANVAS, COURTESY THE JEWISH MUSEUM; AND DESIGNS KOBI HALPERIN AND RALPH LAUREN, PHOTOGRAPHER YAKI HALPERIN.

AN ODE TO PLASTIC BAGS

by CHANA WIDAWSKI

HERE I AM, ACROSS THE WORLD, in Siem Reap, Cambodia, sitting on the floor, stapler in hand, sharing smiles with women from a local shelter, entranced by the 100,000 hand-cut sheets of recycled plastic bags fluttering all around us. We are assembling a giant 255-meter *naga* (a mythical water serpent), which will rise in the Siem Reap River, its purpose to call attention to environmental issues and the nonsensical use—and discarding—of plastic bags. As an activist working on domestic violence and human trafficking projects in Cambodia, I'm lucky to meet Fleur Bourgeois Smith and Seckon Leong, talented artists committed to women's issues and also the environment. We share a deep disgust for the countless bags of plastic we spot all around the world, floating in otherwise pristine waters, dangling from beautiful trees, and clogging gutters. Everywhere.

Back home in New York, I'm a green environmentalist who supports a ban. I join rallies: Ban-the-bag! Mandate a 10-cent bag charge! Just Say No! Frequently bombarded with alarming facts about the evils of plastic bags, I am dumbfounded each time I'm offered one for a single-item purchase I will clearly consume immediately.

The Jewish value of *bal tashchit*, not wasting, has been ingrained in me. I learned about this ethical principle in Jewish day school and summer camp. But I lived it, to an extreme degree, at home. In addition to being "green," I am also *greeneh*. (In Yiddish this means I'm a "greenhorn," from immigrant stock.) As I've described in these pages before (Spring 2012 to be precise), I'm the child of a Holocaust survivor, and I grew up learning that purpose and function could be found in almost every object. From tiny morsels of food to pickle jars, nothing reusable was ever thrown away.

Maddened by the collections of "stuff" cluttering my childhood house, I would sneer at the assemblage of old bags, announcing, "Seriously Mom, that store isn't even open anymore." At the grocery store, I would cringe with embarrassment when she would take extras, "just in case."

And yet, despite my childhood discomfort, I find myself today (as maybe many of us do), returning to something that feels parentally familiar even though I foreswore it when I was younger. If only my mother could see the magnificent plastic bag collections I now house! They're at my office, in my backpacks, in my bicycle basket, and even inside the reusable totes I use for groceries—just in case.

I sometimes feel I have good plastic-bag karma. As I stood barefoot washing dishes on a recent evening, I suddenly felt water streaming between my feet, coming from under my kitchen sink, home to a plastic bag collection that could rival any *greeneh*'s. I got down on my hands and knees and started removing things for the cleanup and repair.

Bag after bag after bag. First the flimsy grocery bags that fit perfectly in my metal trash can. Then the little ones, ideal for toting snacks or protecting my bike seat from the rain. Just as I was beginning to roll my eyes and make fun of myself for this mindboggling collection of bags so closely resembling the ones I ridiculed in childhood, I discovered my durable rectangular-shaped clear plastic bag with navy rope handles (home to a neatly folded assortment of high quality, large and sturdy bags) was now filled to the brim with water. It was a plastic-bag miracle! Gallons of water that could have damaged my floors were now contained in a bag my friends would have (had they known about it) insisted with anti-clutter passion that I throw away.

Some of these gems are impressively durable and will surely come in handy, while others are vintage, offering tangible reminders of stores and even industries that are no longer. I certainly couldn't throw away J & R Music World's strong blue plastic bag with white sturdy handles, the heavy-duty bright orange one from the fascinating thrift shop in Japan or the colorful striped one I toted around Croatia.

I find myself today (as maybe many of us do), returning to something that feels comfortingly familiar even though I foreswore it when I was younger.

Whether I'm traveling around the world with my knapsack, biking around New York, or disposing of a dead mouse, plastic bags always come in handy. I've used mine as boot liners, shower caps, packing protectors, gloves for picking up gross things, doggie-bags for saving food, guarantors of a dry place to sit on a wet day, and as rain gear. These polyethylene products can certainly be repurposed, can possibly be recycled and can surely provoke a good public debate. Many are used only for a few seconds. Others are of such terrible quality that they serve no purpose—and yet will still take a thousand years to break down.

As a woman, I find myself enjoying an internal debate sparked by plastic bags as well. With a natural protective instinct, I'm eager to shield our environment from the terrible plastic waste, yet I'm thrilled to have a personal stockpile, knowing the protection the bags themselves offer. So it is with bittersweet feelings that I will attend the next Ban the Bag rally, likely with a plastic bag or two in my canvas tote, baggage I carry daily, reminding me that I am both green and *greeneh*. ■

Chana Widawski, a social worker, leads local park and community programming, educational trips around the globe, and works with survivors of abuse and violence.